

SERVANTS
OF
THE WORD

The Prophets of Israel

by

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Preface

PERHAPS no writer in this series had a more difficult task than Professor Smart, and that for two main reasons. One is that the prophetic literature is so vast. Fifteen books of the Old Testament are composed of prophetic oracles, and prophets also appear in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. To be able to see the individual ideas and messages of so many prophets and to be able to present them in an orderly way is itself a major accomplishment. And the reader, finding new individuality among the prophets and seeing the fundamental unity of the prophetic tradition, will be grateful for this quick but careful leading through some very difficult Old Testament books.

The other reason is more important. Too many Christians have viewed the prophets as mere mechanical predictors of the New Testament. This is to fail to listen to the prophets themselves. For the prophets spoke God's word first of all to their own day. They were men of flesh and bone, of anguish and joy, who brought their messages to bear upon the corruptions and despairs of human beings. In this book, the reader will find himself in a new way "inside" the minds and hearts of these valiant messengers of God. To be sure, the prophets point to Jesus Christ. But they point to him, not in

the detailed predictions of men who did not really know what they were saying, but in the fact that he shared with them the prophetic viewpoint on the world and God's active power in it. He, like them, "came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45); he, like them, was a servant of the Word.

The Westminster Guides to the Bible grew in the first instance out of the stimulus of the Layman's Theological Library. If, we thought, laymen in the church could be so eloquently encouraged to be theologians, why could they not be encouraged to be Biblical scholars as well? In the modern resurgence of serious thinking about the Christian faith, the study of the Bible has played a major role. But the methods and results of this recent study have not been made available to laymen.

The Westminster Guides to the Bible seek to fill this gap. In nine brief volumes, we introduce the riches of the major portions of the Bible and of the period "between the Testaments." The writers share the conviction that the Bible lies at the heart of Christianity, and that it is imperative that laymen be aided to take a firm grip on Biblical faith. We are certain that this means no denial of the mind. On the contrary, the Bible demands the utmost our minds can give it, and searching study repays our efforts with new insights.

Of course, we are primarily concerned with the Bible, not with our books about it. We hope that the reader will have his Bible in hand as he reads these books, and that he will turn to it again when he has finished. We dare to hope that he will turn from these guides with greater anticipation to the Bible itself.

And it is with laymen, who are the backbone of the church, that we are concerned. We have written, not for scholars al-

ready learned, but for those who seek to learn. We are certain that no wishy-washy faith, no cheap "religiousness," is wanted. In the vigor of Biblical faith we trust that the reader will find invigoration. If so, the church of Christ will be served.

EDWIN M. GOOD

NOTHING more disastrous for the church can be conceived than that the voice of Jesus Christ should fall silent within it. Let there no longer be any reading or interpretation of his words, let Christians cease to speak of him or even to think of him, and soon the church would be dead. The Christian church lives not of its own will and strength but in response to the voice of its Lord.

But we hear the voice of Jesus Christ only when our ears are open to the witness of his apostles. We cannot have him apart from them. Jesus himself wrote no words. He committed his teaching and his gospel to the care and keeping of a handful of men. In the New Testament we have in various forms the church's memory of the witness of these men to Jesus Christ. Take away their words and we would know nothing of him. Therefore, we need not merely the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels but the whole of the New Testament if we would rightly hear his voice. That is why Paul says that the church has as its foundation Jesus Christ as cornerstone and also the apostles (Eph. 2:20).

What may surprise us, however, is that Paul includes the prophets alongside the apostles in the foundation of the church. Paul, and the whole of the early church with him, heard the

voice of the church's Lord both in the preaching of the apostles and in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It would have been unthinkable to them that the Old Testament should become a closed book or should be looked upon as a less than Christian book. They opened the Old Testament and from it preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. For them it was essential to a right understanding of him. They knew no other Jesus Christ than him who in himself and his mission and his gospel was the fulfillment of the agelong purpose of God. Let the Old Testament and its prophets be cut away, and the figure of Jesus would be subtly changed. To know only the story of the New Testament was to see only the final act in a drama of redemption that had been unfolding for centuries. Who could understand the final act if he turned his back on all that went before? Jesus himself refused to stand alone; he bound himself together not only with John the Baptist but with all the prophets of Israel, just as he bound himself into one with his apostles. Therefore, we have to say that if the voice of the prophets ceases to be heard within the church, Jesus Christ himself is no longer rightly heard and understood.

How little the prophets are known at first hand is shown by the fact that the word "prophet" is so frequently misinterpreted. To many people it means one who foretells what is going to happen before it happens. To others it signifies a preacher who attacks social evils and proposes reforms. There is an element of prediction in Old Testament prophecy, and prophets indeed attacked social evils, but neither definition gets at the heart of what it meant to be a prophet. Before all else a prophet was a man whose task in life was to declare faithfully to his countrymen the mind of God concerning them. There is no better description of a prophet than that which is given in Isa. 50:4: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a learner, that I may know how to sustain with a

word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as a learner." Elsewhere the same prophet describes the function of the prophet in less comforting fashion: "He made my mouth like a sharp sword" (Isa. 49:2). In accordance with varying situations, the word that the prophet hears from God and delivers to his people brings mercy and encouragement, or judgment and consternation, but both have in them healing and strength. The surgeon who wishes to bring comfort to a wounded man has sometimes to probe deeply into the wound.

Called by God, the prophet knows himself so at one with God that he speaks to his people as if God himself were speaking. Yet he is at the same time so at one with his people that he feels in his own flesh the pain of the judgment he proclaims and often pleads with God on their behalf. Because his God is sovereign over the whole of man's life, his word from God has to do with every aspect of human existence and not only with some special "religious" aspect. He is a watchman over the nation's life to warn it of the inroads of ruinous evils, a shepherd to keep the people from straying into disobedience. Because his God loves justice and hates injustice, a prophet is the friend and spokesman of the poor and oppressed and is willing to take his own life in his hands to defend their cause. His concern for the nation calls him at times to play the part of a statesman and critic of national policy. But always he is the man in Israel who knows that only in faithfulness to its covenant with God can Israel have a future and that the breach of that relationship must bring death.

The prophet, then, does have something to say about the future. We shall see in the next chapter that in the early period of Israel's history and among popular prophets as late as the time of Jeremiah divination and soothsaying were mixed with

prophecy. But men such as Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, disassociated themselves entirely from such attempts to foretell the future, condemning them as pagan. The true prophet's concern with the future was different in kind. He predicted misfortune or blessing according to his understanding of the existing relation between Israel and God. He was certain of two things: that God would keep his promise to bless a faithful Israel and that the breaking of Israel's covenant with God would destroy the very foundations of the nation's life. Thus, in general, prediction in the prophet's message resembled the predictions of a physician upon the basis of his diagnosis of the patient's condition.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE PROPHETS

A hasty glance through the contents of the Old Testament gives no adequate impression of the place that the prophets hold in the Bible as a whole. There are twenty-two books in the English Old Testament before we come to the first of the seventeen books of the Prophets. These latter occupy less than a third of the total space. It might be easy for the reader to miss the fact that the prophets are to the Old Testament what Jesus of Nazareth is to the New. The Old Testament is mainly the product of the prophetic faith, and undoubtedly none of it would have come down to us in its present form had it not been for the prophets. Indeed, Israel came into existence and survived the harsh vicissitudes of its history guided and sustained by words of prophets.

The influence of the prophets reaches far beyond the books that contain their oracles. The "J" Document of the Pentateuch, written in the tenth century B.C., is the product of a prophetic mind. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, called by the Jews "the former prophets," are actually a prophetic interpretation of the nation's history, written in a

day of disaster in order to bring the people to a better understanding of their true destiny and to point out to them where they had gone astray from it. The Book of Deuteronomy is a powerful sermon to Israel embodying the deepest insights of the prophets. The psalms are the response in worship of a people who had come to know God through the words of the prophets. Job, as he wrestles with the meaning of his life's experience, is very close to the prophet Jeremiah.

Any one of the great prophets standing alone is of such stature that he might have been the founder of a world religion if his individuality had not been subordinated to the life of Israel. We do not grasp the cumulative power of their ministries until we realize that for eight hundred years, from Moses at the beginning of the thirteenth century B.C. to Second Isaiah at the end of the sixth century B.C., they stand in a majestic line, each one building on the achievement of those who preceded him. They form an amazingly unified tradition, with sharp differences of temperament and emphasis among them but with remarkable consistency in their central doctrines. After the exile the spoken word gave way for five centuries to the written word. Here and there, as in The Book of Jonah, we are made aware that the prophetic tradition lived on, but it was the scribe and the priest who now held the center of the stage. The scribe was an expert in the interpretation of Scripture. The priest gave over to him the instruction of the people in the law of God and confined himself to ritual duties. The voice of the prophet was no longer heard.

THE REBIRTH OF THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

Then, as one born out of due season, came John the Baptist, who must be recognized as a prophet of Israel even though the report of his activity is in the New Testament (Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-20). John consciously patterned his outward

manner — his coat of camel's hair and leather breeches and his choice of the wilderness as his dwelling — after Elijah, and like Elijah he raised his voice against the corrupting influences of a pagan civilization upon the faith of Israel. He broke through the neat structure of the Jewish religion of his time with his harsh demand upon every Israelite, religious or irreligious, for a thoroughgoing repentance and return to God. It is little wonder that superstitious people thought one of the ancient prophets had come back to earth. Like Jeremiah before him he went to prison for giving unwelcome critical advice to royalty.

Often in studies of the prophets of Israel the line is drawn as if the climax of the development were in Judaism rather than in the New Testament. John the Baptist and Jesus are not ranked among the prophets of Israel but are left aside as founders of a totally new movement. This leads to serious misunderstandings and to a false view not only of Judaism and the Old Testament but also of Christianity. In John, and then much more completely in Jesus, the great tradition of Israel's prophets came alive again after a sleep of centuries. Jesus' mission was to "the lost sheep of *the house of Israel*." He had no thought of creating a church completely apart from Israel. Like all the prophets before him he called his nation to repentance and to the recovery of its destiny as God's chosen instrument for the redemption of the world. Jesus in his own person was the fulfillment of the prophetic destiny of Israel, and the church that came into being in response to him thought of itself as a new or reborn Israel.

In bringing to its consummation the purpose of God that was alive in all the prophets, Jesus was much more than a prophet. He served the word of God, which they had served, but it so possessed him that the church was eventually to say that he *was* the Word (John 1:1-14). In him dwelt all the full-

ness of God's truth and love and holiness. That dare not conceal from us, however, the marks of the prophet in his ministry. He is "sent from God" and endowed with the Spirit of God to undertake his task. The seed that he sows in men's lives is the word of God. Like the prophets he not only speaks for God to men but also intercedes for men with God. His words and actions are "with authority," the authority of immediate revelation. He declares the imminent judgment of God upon the cities of Galilee and upon Jerusalem and calls all Israelites to repent before it is too late. His compassion is especially for the poor, the naked, the hungry, the helpless, the outcast. He blasts all merely ritual religion that men substitute for a genuine obedience to God's will. One of his sharpest weapons is the prophetic parable, which he adopts and perfects. He makes use of acted parables. And finally, like Amos and Jeremiah, he draws upon himself the murderous wrath of civil and religious authorities. There can be no question but that Jesus, whatever more must be said of him, belongs historically in the ranks of the prophets of Israel as the last and greatest of them. The Christian claim is that in him, where the series reaches its climax, the full meaning of what God was doing in his prophets stands revealed. When we recognize Jesus' oneness with them we do not "draw him down" to the level of a prophet but rather we lift them up to be understood as witnesses to the Word that in the fullness of time was to be made flesh in Jesus Christ.

THUS far we have used the word "prophet" to denote a remarkable series of men who in the profoundest sense knew themselves called into God's service. We have now to recognize that such men were few in Israel and that much more numerous were others who bore the name "prophet" but were of a somewhat different character. In I Kings, ch. 22, four hundred prophets in unison tell the kings of Israel and Judah what they want to hear. Micaiah, who stands alone in contrast to them, mocking them and telling the kings the truth even though it means risking imprisonment, clearly belongs in a different tradition. Therefore, when we inquire into the beginnings of prophecy, we must ask whether these two types have the same or a diverse origin.

Some scholars have supposed that the prophetic movement in Israel began in a crude and primitive fashion and gradually advanced until it reached a pure and noble form in such men as Amos and Hosea in the middle of the eighth century. But this explanation is unsatisfactory. It requires us to assume that all prophets before Amos were of a much more primitive character and that, in so far as Moses, Elijah, Nathan, or Micaiah appear to be genuine prophets of God, their nobler features have been attributed to them by a later age. It also makes

Amos a spectacular innovator, while he himself claims to represent a long-standing tradition. He says plainly that it has been through prophets that God has guided his people across the centuries (*Amos*. 2:10-11). Also, there is a historical solidity to the figures of the earlier prophets that must be recognized. In addition to this, the "J" Document of the Pentateuch, a prophetic work, which may be as early as 950 B.C., shows a profound understanding of God's relation with Israel. We should recognize, therefore, that different levels and types of prophecy existed alongside one another through the centuries, not without mutual influence and yet never to be confused with one another.

THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS

Popular forms of prophecy in Israel must be seen against the background of practices, widespread in the ancient Near East, by which men expected to divine the intentions of the spiritual powers that controlled events. Mesopotamian society made use of a wide variety of approaches. It was thought that the mind of the gods might be reflected in the movements of the stars, the patterns on the surface of water, the shapes of clouds, the flight of birds, the condition of the entrails of birds and animals, and also, more directly, in dreams and visionary experiences. As elsewhere among primitive people, ecstatic trances were regarded as caused by a divine spirit inhabiting a human body for a time, making communications from the spirit world possible. The Egyptian story of Wenammon (1100 B.C.) tells of an incident at Byblos in Syria in which, following a sacrifice to the gods, a noble youth was seized by a god, the seizure being evident to all from the frenzy that continued all night long. In the frenzy the youth uttered a message that was interpreted as direct divine instruction. In Greece, the Pythian priestess at Delphi fell into an

ecstatic condition, perhaps by inhaling a vapor from a crack in the earth, and the sounds coming from her lips in this condition were understood by the interpreters as oracles from Apollo himself. Her voice was not her own but that of the god.

It is not difficult to see a connection between these phenomena and divinatory practices in Israel. The "sons of the prophets" were guilds or associations of prophets, which seem to have been located at various shrines and to have been closely linked with the priests as officials of the cult. The term "sons" may indicate a hereditary office or merely the fact of association. A characteristic performance of one of these groups is to be seen in I Sam. 10:5-13, where Saul, on his way home from his first interview with Samuel, meets them coming down from the hilltop shrine. They are "prophesying" in an ecstatic fashion and their frenzy lays hold also upon Saul, drawing him into their company. They have musicians with them, music being used to induce the ecstatic condition (see II Kings 3:15, where Elisha requires a musician before he can prophesy). The radical character of the frenzy is evident in I Sam. 19:24, where it leads to such wild conduct as stripping off clothing and lying naked for hours.

Because of these parallels between the practices of the sons of the prophets and non-Israelite forms of divination, both have sometimes been regarded as wholly pagan, a sharp line of demarcation being drawn between the popular and the great prophets. But in the traditions of Israel, Samuel is represented as presiding over a guild of ecstatic prophets (I Sam. 19:20), and Elijah and Elisha are associated with guilds at Beth-el and Jericho (II Kings 2:3, 5). Moreover, visions play a part in the activity of great prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and some scholars think they have found signs of ecstasy in all four. This in itself should prevent

a too-hasty scorn for all ecstasies, or even more so, a scorn for the presence of Spirit ecstasy in the New Testament church. The apostles, in Acts, ch. 2, "speak in tongues" when the Spirit of God takes possession of them, and Paul, whom no one will be likely to call pagan or primitive in his religion, confesses that he has known ecstatic visions and has "spoken in tongues" (I Cor. 14:18; II Cor., ch. 12). It is clear that such phenomena may be the expression either of a crude form of spirit possession or of the indwelling of a man by the Holy Spirit of God. It is the inner content of the phenomenon that makes all the difference. Ecstatic prophecy, therefore, could be united with a deep and genuine concern to discern the mind of God and declare his will to the nation, even though its very form made it peculiarly open to perversion into superstitious forms of divination.

THE GREAT PROPHETIC SUCCESSION

To see the real beginning of the prophetic tradition in Israel we must go behind the "sons of the prophets" to *Moses*. The origin of the nation and the origin of the prophetic calling were deeply interwoven. The experience in which Moses heard his call to leadership has all the marks of a prophetic call (Ex., ch. 3). A man of unusual gifts and training, who in spite of his education in royal Egyptian schools had not lost his sense of solidarity with his own Semitic people, he found himself, as a result of a sudden rash action on behalf of one of his countrymen, living in lonely exile beyond Egypt's borders. Tending sheep on the mountainside, he had time to think deeply about what was happening to his people in Egypt. Then, one day, a revelation of God's purpose for him and his people came to him in a sudden blinding vision. The visionary character of the experience is slightly obscured, the vision being reported as if it were an ~~externally observable event~~. This

has led to all kinds of explanations of the bush that seemed to be on fire yet was not consumed by the fire. Visions, however, do not require such explanations. The fiery bush seen by Moses belongs to a vision of God, fire or blinding light being consistently in the Scriptures a manifestation of God's presence. Moses' experience needs to be compared with that of Isaiah, of Ezekiel, or of Paul. Out of the fiery light a voice speaks to him, and he is called into the service of God as a prophet, who will be not only God's spokesman to his people but also an instrument in the hand of God for the effecting of his redemptive purpose.

Legend and history are mingled in the story of Moses. He is both prophet and wonder worker. Also, the fact that all reinterpretations of Israel's law for centuries were attributed to him makes it difficult to discern with any absolute certainty the original character of his achievement. There is no reason to question, however, that he stood at the center of the exodus, interpreting the events as God's gracious dealings with a people that were as yet only a band of slaves, or that it was through his mediation that the nation came into being as the covenant people of Yahweh.

It is possible for the covenant to be interpreted either in legal or in personal terms. In the light of prophetic teaching the latter is more likely, for Israel's relation to Yahweh is likened to that of a wife to her husband or of children to a father. (See Hos., chs. 1 to 3; 11:1-9.) The creative act that gave Israel life as a nation was God's choice of it in love, made known to it in the events of the exodus and through the prophetic word of Moses. But God's love in its holiness was a demanding love, and its demands were spelled out by Moses in the commandments. First, Israel was to respond to Yahweh with unconditional love and then in love obey the command-

ments. Covenant love and obedience in the whole of life were to be the core of the prophetic message through all time.

During the period of the Judges, when the Israelites were battling to maintain their grip upon the hill country of Palestine, there is little mention of prophets. *Deborah* alone bears the title (Judg. 4:4), and in her as in Moses the prophetic office is combined with that of national leader. It is she who urges Barak to rally the Israelite tribes and do battle with the Canaanites under Sisera. The scattered tribes were in danger of being crushed utterly by the tyranny of the Canaanites. How could a prophet of Yahweh stand by and see Yahweh's people destroyed? The battle over, Deborah sang in triumph (Judg., ch. 5) of the greatness of Yahweh, who had again delivered his people. Here we see vividly the concern of the prophet with the total life of the nation.

No other prophet is mentioned until the era of the Judges is about to give way to the new era of the kingdom. *Samuel* is represented in the tradition as judge, prophet, and priest. As prophet, he appears as a seer, who for a fee can divine the whereabouts of a farmer's lost asses, but also as a messenger of doom to the priestly house of Eli, and as the one through whom God chooses and rejects kings. Thus in Samuel a number of different lines come together. His association with the ecstatic prophets indicates that by this time the prophetic function had come to be embodied in these guilds that in their devotion to Yahweh were enthusiastic and even fanatical proponents of a distinctive national destiny. His association with the priesthood and cult indicates how closely prophet and priest were allied with each other. And the remarkable authority within the nation attributed to him, by which he appointed kings and laid down the constitution of the kingdom (I Sam. 8:4-22), indicates the awareness in

Israel that the nation had its origin in its covenant relation with Yahweh and that the man who spoke for Yahweh had an authority superior to that of kings and princes.

PROPHETS AND KINGS

In the kingdom of David, the prophet *Nathan* occupies an official position in the royal sanctuary alongside Zadok, the priest, the two of them being commissioned by David to anoint Solomon as his successor (I Kings 1:34). But the incident for which Nathan is chiefly remembered is that in which he confronts David with his sin in plotting the death of Uriah the Hittite that he might take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, for himself (II Sam., ch. 12). Nathan trapped David into self-judgment with a parable, a cunning device that was designed by the prophets (see I Kings 20:38-42; Isa., ch. 5; The Book of Jonah) and brought to its perfection in the parables of Jesus. Nathan in this one incident shows the marks of the really great prophet: he is watchman over the life of the nation to guard it from ruinous evil; he risks his life in order to speak a most unpleasant truth to the king; he expresses Yahweh's concern for victims of injustice even though the victim is not an Israelite but a Hittite.

The interest of the prophets in political developments in the nation is evident in the story of *Ahijah* the Shilonite. In protest against the tyranny of Solomon, Ahijah called upon Jeroboam to lead a rebellion of the ten northern tribes, announcing this as Yahweh's intention by the dramatic and symbolic act of tearing a new garment he was wearing into twelve pieces and giving ten of them to Jeroboam (I Kings 11:29-39). This was not to be the last time that the prophets would instigate rebellion. Since their God was the rightful sovereign of the nation and they were his spokesmen, they felt themselves justified in overthrowing an order that to them

was contrary to his will. Thus *Jehu*, the son of Hanani, encouraged an army officer, Zimri, to overthrow the house of Baasha in Israel (I Kings, ch. 16). Sadly, in seven days his nominee for the throne was assassinated by another army officer, Omri, whose dynasty was to be more lasting but not more friendly to the prophetic faith. Ahab, the son of Omri, was to threaten the continued existence of Yahweh's prophets in the Northern Kingdom.

The mission of *Elijah*, who was from Tishbeh in Gilead east of Jordan, was to prevent the annihilation of the Yahweh cult in Israel. Pious sentiment later built a legendary character around the figure of Elijah, making him, in one scene (II Kings, ch. 1), an awesome wonder worker, who was able at will to call down fire from heaven and burn up two companies of fifty royal soldiers each, and who, in another, was miraculously fed and preserved by Yahweh (I Kings 17:4, 14; 19:6). But behind all such legendary features is a solid historical figure, a prophet of major proportions. He is definitely associated with the prophetic guilds (II Kings 2:3, 5), but at no time are ecstatic phenomena reported of him. He performs what would normally be a priestly act in offering sacrifice. (I Kings, ch. 18.) But in his major acts he stands alone, like an Amos or a Jeremiah. Of the hundred cult prophets who were hidden and kept alive by Obadiah (I Kings 18:3-4), none risked appearing in the open alongside Elijah as a champion of the Yahweh cult against the priests of the Tyrian Baal. In courageous faith Elijah was the equal of a Jeremiah, willing to strike a blow against the power of 850 prophets of Baal. (I Kings 18:17-40.) Like Nathan he was the spokesman of a victim of the king's injustice when Ahab engineered the death of Naboth in order to get possession of his land. (I Kings, ch. 21.) Like Moses he received a revelation of God on Mount Horeb, which in a time of despair sent him back

to his task confident that all was not lost. (I Kings 19:9-18.) Like Samuel and Ahijah he planned to replace one royal dynasty with another. (V. 16.)

Elisha, the immediate successor of Elijah, is difficult to describe, since legends have clustered round his figure in an unusual manner. In fact his life story is almost wholly a succession of legends in which he has more of the character of a medicine man than of a prophet. (II Kings 2:19 to 6:7.) He knows how to counteract the poison of death-dealing water. His curse brings two she-bears out of the woods to kill forty-two boys who in boy fashion jeered at him. He makes water flow in a dry riverbed. He multiplies oil miraculously to enable the widow of one of his colleagues to pay her debts. He saves another colleague from embarrassment by making a borrowed axhead float until the man can recover it. The one really typical prophetic act reported of him is the anointing and inciting of Jehu to seize the royal power from the house of Ahab.

Micaiah, who belongs to the same epoch, is of much greater stature as a prophet. We hear of him only once, but in that incident he makes a deep impression (I Kings, ch. 22). Ahab, of Israel, and Jehosaphat, of Judah, were planning an attack upon a border region of Syria. They consulted a group of four hundred prophets concerning the venture and were assured that their God would be with them and give them success. Ahab was satisfied with this, but Jehoshaphat distrusted their judgment and inquired if there were not another prophet. Ahab replied that there was one, Micaiah, but he hated him because he continually prophesied evil things of him. The king of Judah insisted upon consulting Micaiah, who at first mockingly repeated the oracle of the four hundred prophets, but, when a true word from Yahweh was demanded, declared that the expedition would meet with a crushing defeat. For his honesty he was thrown in prison to await the outcome of

the battle. Micaiah is significant as an example of how, even though the institution of prophecy might suffer widespread degeneracy, there remained here and there a prophet of integrity whose one concern was to interpret the mind of God to his people.

THE MINGLING OF LEGEND AND HISTORY

When we examine the traditions concerning Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, we are at once struck by a sharp difference between them and the "writing" prophets, as represented in their own books. Concerning the earlier prophets, chiefly we have stories of their doings but little report of their preaching, while the books of the prophets are almost exclusively collections of their oracles with only slight references here and there to their doings. Also, the earlier traditions mingle legend with history in a way that is annoying to the modern historian, while the literary prophets are devoid of legendary features and stand out as vivid historical figures against the background of the events of their time. One has only to compare Elisha with Amos to see the contrast. Elisha calls down fire from heaven, cures poisoned springs, revives the dead, multiplies food, heals leprosy, and makes an iron axhead float. He is a wonder worker. Amos engages in no such feats. His prophetic ministry consists in hearing a word from God for his nation and in declaring it bluntly and faithfully whether the people wish to hear it or not. But the mingling of legend and history is no excuse for dismissing the traditions as totally legendary. The historical nucleus must be recognized in the midst of legend. With Elisha the elimination of legend and the discounting of stories that are a repetition of stories told of Elijah leave a very shadowy historical figure, but not so with Moses and Elijah. When a full allowance has been made for the growth of legend, there remain the clear features of men sent

from God, unconditionally at his command, and ready to give themselves regardless of the cost on behalf of the people who were under their care.

We must be impressed with the small number of great prophetic figures between Moses and Amos in a period of five centuries. Also, concerning some of these few, such as Nathan and Micaiah, we hear little, and most likely would have heard nothing had not each come in conflict with his king. Prophets who engaged in no such dramatic encounters would not be likely to be remembered in the nation's history. It is perhaps safe to assume that there were far more prophets of worthy stature than those of whom we have record, and that the preservation of a great prophetic tradition in spite of all the forces antagonistic to it was the achievement of a succession of men whose names we shall never know. This is rendered more probable when we consider that in the New Testament we have a clear record only of portions of the ministries of Paul and Peter, with slight references to several others, though we know that many must have been active in the early church. The cause of God has ever been carried forward from age to age by countless persons unremembered by any later age, who were content to live by the truth of God and to serve it without making any attempt to perpetuate their own names. The fact that the authors of a major part of the Scriptures of both Testaments are unknown by name is emphatic witness to this. They gave God the glory and kept none for themselves.

A NEW era in the history of prophecy began in Israel with the appearance of Amos in the middle of the eighth century B.C. There were prophets, great and true, before his time. Amos himself asserts that through the centuries God maintained his covenant relation with Israel through the witness of prophets and Nazirites (Amos 2:11). He was no innovator but rather stood in the full stream of a great tradition. And yet his ministry marks a most significant new development in prophecy.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

It was not by accident that the oracles of Amos were the first to be preserved in a book by themselves. This was not done for any earlier prophet. We must ask why it was done for Amos. Partly, it may be that in him the prophet of God broke completely free from the trammels of popular practices that laid prophecy open to serious perversion in the direction of paganism. Amos disowned any connection with the prophetic guilds (ch. 7:14). Partly, it may be that he represented with such simplicity and integrity the true nature of prophecy that he gave to it its classic formulation. Partly, it may be that his warnings of doom on an unrepentant nation were

followed so quickly by historical catastrophes that first shook and then destroyed the Northern Kingdom that his words were revered and treasured as sure words of God. Certainly his ministry called into being a group of persons who shared his faith and wished to preserve the memory of his oracles and who were distinctly different in character from the prophetic guilds in which faith was mingled with superstition and the image of remembered prophets was blurred with legendary features.

This preservation of prophetic oracles, whether in written or in oral form, was of very great importance for future developments, not merely because it created a nucleus of prophetic Scripture, but because it was a major force in bringing into being outside the circle of official priests and prophets a continuity of prophetic tradition on which future prophets would nourish their souls. Undoubtedly it also exerted an influence on official prophets and priests within the cult, an influence that is particularly evident in Deuteronomy and the Priestly document of the Pentateuch.

AMOS AND HIS TIMES

Little is known about the personal life of Amos beyond the facts that he was a herder of cattle and sheep and a pincher of sycamore fruit at Tekoa, some ten miles southeast of Jerusalem in Judah, that he felt himself called by God to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom in the time of Jeroboam II, and that after a brief ministry there he was rudely ordered by the priest of Beth-el, Amaziah, to go home to Judah where he belonged. (Amos 1:1; 7:10-14.) Fortunately, however, in his oracles he unconsciously paints his own portrait, and we are able with some fullness to get to know both the man and the situation that confronted him. We learn very quickly that he was a poet of unique power, who knew how to shape

his words to make them penetrate the calloused consciences of his hearers. Often they strike like hammer blows. Amos was a blunt man, who could express his disgust with the dissolute women of Samaria by calling them to their faces "you cows of Bashan" (ch. 4:1). Yet his poetry and his thought are in no way uncouth. Rather, he represents the combined literary and religious traditions in Israel in their finest flowering. Though he was a man of the country, he was no untutored yokel.

The nation that confronted Amos had enjoyed more prosperity and security in the eighth century than it had for many generations. In 782 B.C. the Assyrians crushed Damascus, the capital of Syria, which had long been Israel's most troublesome neighbor. Then came a decline in the strength of Assyria that for nearly forty years kept it from expeditions westward into the Mediterranean region. Not until 746 B.C. was an Assyrian army to trouble Palestine again. Control of the trade routes that pass through Palestine had brought wealth to a new aristocracy in Israel. The long, unbroken reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and of Uzziah in Judah contributed also to the general stability and success. The nation was pervaded by an exuberant optimism. The good times were interpreted by prophets, priests, and people as an indication of Yahweh's favor toward Israel. And the people responded by heaping lavish offerings upon the altars at the sanctuaries and crowding their courts during the religious festivals (ch. 4:5).

Amos, however, was troubled at what he could see happening in the life of the nation. As a sheep farmer he would have to take his wool to market and most likely had visited the markets not only in Jerusalem but farther north in Samaria. There he noted the depression into poverty of what had once been the sturdy, independent peasant class. Crowded off their ancestral farms by land-hungry plutocrats, they had no means

remembered that to the prophets the Israel of God comprehended both kingdoms. There is nothing remarkable in Amos' addressing himself to Samaria and Beth-el rather than to Jerusalem, since to him the point of most dangerous corruption lay in that more prosperous region.

The Structure of the Book. There is no indication in Amos' book of the order in which he delivered his oracles. They fall naturally into two divisions: sermons, in chs. 1 to 6, and visions, in chs. 7 to 9. Chapter 9:11-15 is plainly a later addition, presupposing a time of exile and promising a restoration very different in character from the future with which Amos threatened his people. Chapter 7:10-17 is a narrative about Amos that breaks into the series of visions and may at one time have stood at the end of a collection of oracles. Some scholars suggest that the visions belong to the period before Amos undertook his mission to Israel and that ch. 7:1-9 is meant to be the vision in which he heard his call to become a prophet. There is little evidence to support this. In the first two sections of ch. 7:1-9, Amos is already performing the intercessory function of a prophet, interceding for the nation, and in all the visions he is delivering the same message that is to be found in chs. 1 to 6. Where Amos spoke, except at Beth-el, is also difficult to determine. In chs. 3:9; 4:1; and 6:1 he seems to be addressing people in Samaria, but it is quite possible for these to be citizens of Samaria who were present at the festival in Beth-el. There is really no necessity to suppose that any of his oracles were delivered elsewhere than at Beth-el.

The Attack on False Religion. Amos speaks so forcefully concerning social evils that sometimes it is not grasped that his central attack was upon the falsification of religious faith in the life of the nation. The peril of the nation was not merely its toleration of social injustices but rather the false

confidence engendered by a total misunderstanding of its relation with God. The doctrine of Israel's election and special covenant relation with Yahweh had become the basis of national pride and security. Surely God would let no harm come to his beloved Israel! Therefore, Amos proclaimed that God's choice of Israel laid upon it a special responsibility. To have known and been known by Yahweh, the God of the whole earth, required of Israel a unique response, and failure to give it would bring crushing judgment. (Ch. 3:1-2.) Israel is not Yahweh's favorite but rather the servant of his purpose. He brought Israel up from Egypt, but he also brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir. (Ch. 9:7.) Yahweh's care is over all the nations. Israel has a special calling as a people through whom God seeks to make himself known, but the nation dare not misinterpret this as a position of special privilege with Yahweh.

Amos also attacked the popular expectation of a day of triumph in which Yahweh would shortly subdue all of Israel's enemies before it. The day of Yahweh will be darkness and not light. (Ch. 5:18-20.) But the stronghold of false confidence he found in the cult itself in whose ritual the people took such delight. The music and the pageantry, together with the soft, encouraging words of prophets and priests, engendered an assurance that Yahweh was with his people and would bless them even more abundantly in the future than he had in the past. Therefore, Amos declared Yahweh's utter abhorrence of the cult and its worship. (Ch. 5:21-24.) He accused them of blinding the people so that they could not see what God expected of them as a nation in covenant with him. The cult itself had become so corrupt that it poisoned the lives of all who had anything to do with it. (Ch. 2:7-8, 12.) Whether Amos wished for the total abolition of the cult, the sacrifices, and the priesthood is open to question. Some hold that he

merely expressed in emphatic terms God's judgment upon all perverted and debased religious institutions. It is certain that like Hosea and Jeremiah he denied that sacrifices had any place in the original Mosaic establishment of religion (ch. 5:25). But sacrifices were only one element in the life of the cult.

The ethical irresponsibility of which Amos accused the nation was to him the consequence of Israel's failure to live as a people in covenant with Yahweh. Yahweh expects of his partner in the covenant that his own justice and truth and holiness will be reflected in the life of the community. The aristocracy, who callously disregarded the rights of the common man and were careless of his welfare, indicated thereby that they no longer knew anything of the God of Israel. Therefore, Amos' primary call to the nation was to return to God. He did not offer his people a code of social conduct whereby they could make themselves acceptable to Yahweh; rather he demanded a radical repentance and return by which alone the nation could recover the foundation of its life in God. Then the well-spring would be reopened from which justice and righteousness would pour forth in an "ever-flowing stream" (ch. 5:24).

The fact that Amos announced so emphatically the end of everything for Israel (chs. 7:8; 8:2; 9:1, 4, 8, 10) has created in some minds the impression that he was a prophet of judgment alone with no note of promise anywhere in his message. This is unjust to him, for, as always with the prophets, judgment and mercy are inseparable; they proclaim judgment to the end that some at least within the nation may repent and find mercy. Thus Amos calls upon Israel to seek Yahweh and live (ch. 5:6, 14), and Yahweh's sending of Amos to Israel in the hour of crisis must be understood as an expression of deepest concern.

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Amos' mission to Israel ended abruptly. It is not surprising that his cutting words made him enemies, but when he announced the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the death of King Jeroboam at the hands of a foreign invader (ch. 7:9), he was branded a conspirator. Amaziah, the priest at the royal sanctuary in Beth-el, ordered him to leave the country, scornfully suggesting that Amos was a kind of religious black-mailer who proclaimed doom until he would be paid to speak more hopeful words. We hear nothing more of Amos, but we can assume from the preservation of his oracles that his influence continued. There are marks of a Judean editor or editors in the book (chs. 1:1; 2:4-5; 9:11-15), which show that the oracles were transmitted by interested people in Judah.

A NATIVE ISRAELITE PROPHET

Hosea, a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, may have been among the worshipers at Beth-el who listened to the thunder of doom in Amos' oracles. There are no passages in Hosea's writings in which we can demonstrate a direct and verbal influence of Amos, and Hosea is distinctly different from Amos in temperament and style. Hosea pleads where Amos thunders. Yet the facts that Amos was the first prophet of major stature to appear in Israel in a century, and that Hosea took up the prophetic task within a few years of Amos' appearance and repeated in his own way Amos' warnings of national ruin, suggest a possible connection between the two. Certainly the people who responded to Amos' message and preserved his oracles would be the first to encourage Hosea. Prophets and priests in general had sunk to a low level (Amos. 2:12; 7:14; Hos. 4:4-6; 6:9; 9:9), and those who still cherished a genuine faith had no rallying point. But in these two prophets they found their spokesmen.

Very little is known about Hosea's personal history except

the name of his father, Beeri, and some rather puzzling hints about his wife and children in chs. 1 and 3. The imagery of his oracles suggests that he was a man of the open country rather than of the city, his figures of speech being drawn from the sights that confront the farmer in his daily life. But he was familiar also with the life of the city, the intrigues of the royal court, and the activities of cultic officials at the various shrines.

Whereas The Book of Amos reflects a prosperous era, The Book of Hosea presupposes a time of confusion, violent deeds, and swift changes in government (Hos. 5:1; 7:3-7; 9:15; 13:10-11). The prophecy of the fall of the house of Jehu (ch. 1:4), an event that can be dated in 746 B.C., suggests that Hosea became a prophet shortly before this. The fact that he does not refer to the Syro-Ephraimitic War of 734 B.C. makes it likely that he ended his mission before then. The period between 747 and 734 B.C. was one that bordered on political anarchy. Assyria was looming on the horizon, and in the thirties its armies were to go marching and looting through the Palestinian states. Hosea mentions Assyria, like Egypt (chs. 5:13; 10:6), only as a powerful neighbor whose help is sought by factions conspiring to seize the government in Israel. Only the blindest, however, could fail to see the threat to Israel's future in the reawakening of Assyria's lust for empire.

The Problem of Approach. Upon opening The Book of Hosea the reader's attention is seized by what seem to be biographical and autobiographical references in chs. 1 and 3, and he may be so fascinated by them that he gives only a cursory glance to the later chapters. The marriage of Hosea with a harlot and his reclaiming of her in the public market have frequently stirred the romantic imagination of commentators and readers to an attempt to reconstruct the personal history of Hosea. He has been supposed by some to have discovered

in the painful experience of a broken marriage and in his own continuing love for an unfaithful wife the truth of God's continuing love for an unfaithful Israel. Frequently he has been contrasted with Amos as the proclaimer of God's love, while Amos knew only God's relentless justice. Chapters 1 and 3 are capable, however, of widely different interpretations and by themselves do not provide a solid basis for understanding the prophet. The text as it stands portrays Hosea's marriage and reclaiming of his wife as an "acted parable" from beginning to end and not as an experience in which he discovered God's love for Israel. Moreover, God's love for his people was intrinsic to the covenant relation long before the time of Hosea. Some interpreters hold that no marriage with a harlot took place, the entire account being a vision or parable in which Hosea pictured Israel's relation with God as if it were his own wife's relation with himself. Certainly Hosea had no intention of focusing attention upon himself, for his entire concern was the awakening of Israel to the recovery of its ruptured relation with God.

It is wise, therefore, to base the interpretation of Hosea primarily upon the oracles in chs. 4 to 13, which are remarkably homogeneous. The reader will at once be struck by the fact that in these chapters Hosea's proclamation of an approaching doom is as relentless as that of Amos. There is a tenderness in Hosea that we miss in Amos. He is himself shattered in heart by his own message of doom, but that does not make him relax the certainty of it. Only in ch. 14 does the darkness lift for a moment and we hear a note of hope similar to that in ch. 3. But in both chs. 3 and 14 the hope is not that somehow Israel may be spared the fires of God's judgment but only that beyond the judgment there may yet be a restoration. Equally with Amos, Hosea insists upon the justice of God, which must bring destruction upon a stubbornly sinful nation.

It is perhaps a clue to the structure of Hosea's ministry that the names given to his three children (ch. 1) strike the same note of inescapable doom that is conveyed by the oracles in chs. 4 to 13. The use of children's names to remind people of a prophet's message occurs also in the ministry of Isaiah (Isa. 7:3; 8:3), and in neither instance can the names be used to reconstruct the prophet's family life. The name "Jezreel" warned Israel that the bloody deeds committed in Jezreel by the royal house (II Kings 10:30-37) must be paid for. The names "not pitied" and "not my people" say that the covenant relation with God has been broken, and Israel can no longer base any hope for the future upon it. It is clear, then, that Hosea had begun his ministry before his first child was born, and, since in the East the weaning of a child takes from two to three years, a period of at least six years is indicated in which Hosea held steadily to a warning of judgment. Some scholars regard the message of hope in chs. 2; 3; and 14 as a later intrusion, but there is no valid reason for denying that these passages are by Hosea. There are facts that point rather to the possibility that Hosea himself at some point in his ministry came to the conviction and declared in word and action his belief that God's love for Israel, though it was severe in judgment and discipline, would yet redeem his wayward people. For Hosea, in chs. 4 to 13, it is in heartbroken love that God brings upon Israel the consequences of its sin. Chapter 2:2-13 seems to have been originally an oracle of doom, to which vs. 1, 14-23, were later added to make it an oracle of doom *and* redemption. Chapter 14 can be understood as a new concluding oracle added by Hosea to an earlier collection of oracles in order to proclaim the possibility of a new beginning beyond the day of judgment. Chapter 3 could then be taken literally as Hosea's own description of how he acted out this message in a living parable, going into the slave mar-

ket to buy back his wife and prescribing for her a period of discipline that she might finally be reclaimed.

The Judean Editor. That another hand than Hosea's was instrumental in putting the book into its present form is evident at once in ch. 1, where the author speaks of Hosea in the third person. The Judean nationality of the editor shows in his naming of kings of Judah prior to kings of Israel in the superscription (ch. 1:1), and in ch. 1:7 where he refers to a deliverance of Judah from a disaster that may have been that of 722 B.C. It is most likely he who, on the basis of ch. 2, described Gomer in ch. 1:2 as "a woman of harlotry." His Judean hand is also evident in ch. 1:10-11, by which he sought to bring ch. 1 into accord with the more hopeful conclusions of chs. 2 and 3. However, not every reference to Judah need be taken as a sign of the editor at work (chs. 5:10, 12-14; 6:4; 8:14). To the prophets there was one people of Israel existing in two kingdoms, and their word was for all Israel. But some of the warnings to Judah (chs. 4:15; 6:11), words of praise for it (ch. 11:12), or expressions of hope for a united Davidic kingdom sound like the intrusion of a Judean voice. The concluding verse of ch. 14 also seems out of character with the book as a whole.

The Message of Hosea. Hosea's main concern is not with political disorder. Nowhere in his prophecies do we find the slashing exposures of social and economic evils that are characteristic of Amos. Hosea penetrates rather to the heart of Israel's problem — the broken covenant. The source of all evil in Israel is the dissolution of this sacred bond upon which the nation's life is founded. Cut apart from God, Israel is no longer capable of faithfulness or steadfast love in human relations and is without that knowledge of God from which all true understanding of life stems. (Ch. 4:1.) Its destiny gone, Israel is a

useless vessel among the nations, with no distinctive purpose to fulfill. (Ch. 8:8.)

Hosea's severity against prophets and priests is comprehensible in the light of his analysis of Israel's plight. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Ch. 4:6.) It was the appointed task of prophet and priest to instruct the people in the knowledge of God and to guide them in his ways. The priest's first duty was the giving of Torah and not sacrifice. Like Amos and Jeremiah, Hosea insists that God did not ask sacrifices of Israel. "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Ch. 6:6.) Sacrificial meals were gay occasions for the worshipers and profitable occasions for the priest, who received his portion of the victim, but they were a snare to the people, leading them into a false conception of what God required of his worshipers. In the cult there was also the practice of sacred prostitution, characteristic of the fertility ritual of the Baal shrines. How intermingled the Baal worship was with the worship of Yahweh is evident in Hosea's envisioning of a day when Israel would no longer call Yahweh "my Baal" (ch. 2:16) and also in his picture of the people's degenerate practices (ch. 4:12-14).

There is a strong polemic in Hosea against foreign influences and entanglements (chs. 5:13; 7:8-9, 11; 8:9). Alliances with countries such as Assyria and Egypt resulted in the recognition of Assyrian and Egyptian gods in Israel and the introduction of their altars and worship alongside the worship of Yahweh. Thus, what began as an expedient for gaining political strength ended in a religious mixture that dissipated the nation's spiritual strength. The worship of Yahweh alone was the source not only of Israel's uniqueness as a nation but also of the moral and spiritual wholeness and vitality of the citi-

zenry. Only in exclusive faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh could Israel be strong.

Hosea shows also a scorn of the kingship and a conviction that Israel has been led astray by her kings, a prophetic viewpoint similar to that which meets us in parts of I Samuel (Hos. 8:4; 13:10-11; see I Sam. 8:6-7, 18; 12:12-15). Yahweh is Israel's king and the prophet has been the true instrument of leadership on Yahweh's behalf (Hos. 12:13). Trust in chariots and force of arms to give security to the nation is a false confidence, for the nation can live only by its faith.

Hosea is as certain as Amos was that Israel is moving swiftly toward a day of doom. But he also proclaims the certainty of a day of redemption beyond the day of doom. The nation will go into exile. Egypt, Assyria, and the wilderness (chs. 9:3; 11:5; 2:14) are all named as the place of exile, showing that Hosea was not certain from what quarter the disaster would come. What he expected was a return to the simple conditions in which the nation began its life under Moses, a time of probation when Israel would make a new beginning. Looking beyond the judgment, he heard God speaking in love to a repentant nation:

“I will heal their faithlessness:
I will love them freely.

. . . .
“I will be as the dew to Israel;
He shall blossom as the lily,
He shall strike root as the poplar.

. . . .
“I am like an evergreen cypress,
From me comes your fruit.”
(Ch. 14:4-5, 8.)

IN A land as small as Palestine, what happened in one kingdom would be quickly known in the other. The preaching of Amos and Hosea in the north may therefore have inspired the appearance of two prophets in Judah. Isaiah, a man of the city, had a long ministry of more than forty years in Jerusalem (742-700 B.C.). Micah was from the rural village of Moresheth-gath in the rolling hills twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem, though he may have delivered some of his oracles in Jerusalem. He seems to have had a much briefer ministry than Isaiah.

The main events which form the background for both prophets are connected with the reappearance of the Assyrian armies in Syria and Palestine where they had not been seen for nearly half a century. Tiglath-pileser III, of Assyria, marched into the Mediterranean region in 738 B.C. and received the tribute of most of the western states. In II Kings 15:19, 20, we read that Menahem, King of Israel, paid a thousand talents of silver in order to retain his throne, collecting the amount from some forty thousand of his subjects. The fact that there were forty thousand people, each of whom could pay a levy of fifty shekels of silver, shows the prosperous condition of Israel. But the yearly demand for such tribute was

bound to produce rebellion. In 734 B.C. Syria and Israel tried to compel Judah to join them in one such rebellion, and Judah called in the help of the Assyrians against them. A number of Assyrian invasions took place: in 734, 722, 711, and 701 B.C. The Egyptians, in order to protect themselves, tried constantly to incite the Palestinian states to revolt and so draw the strength of the Assyrians against them. It was these tumultuous and tragic years that Isaiah and Micah undertook to interpret to Judah the mind of God concerning all things in the life of the nation.

ISAIAH OF JERUSALEM

The Call of Isaiah. The beginning of Isaiah's ministry is dated by him in the year that King Uzziah died, 742 B.C. (Isa. 6:1.) From the fact that forty years later he was still active and alert as a prophet we would judge him to have been a young man at the time. The death of Uzziah marked the end of nearly a half century of unbroken peace and prosperity. Isaiah had undoubtedly shared the optimism and religious complacency that pervaded both Israel and Judah. But one day as he worshiped in the Temple a vision of God in his majesty and holiness and universal power broke through his complacency. (Ch. 6.) He saw the Lord, "high and lifted up." But when he tells what he saw, it is with the utmost restraint. He saw a figure upon a great throne but not the face—only the robes that filled the Temple, and these only dimly through the smoke. Seraphim hovered about the throne, by their attitudes reflecting the nature of the God they served. Their song told Isaiah of God's holiness and that God's glory filled the whole earth. Such a God could be worshiped only by a people who would reflect in their lives his holiness and would be ready to yield themselves to his majestic purposes.

The vision of God opened Isaiah's eyes to see himself and

his people in a new light. In the presence of a holy God their unholiness made them unworthy to live. In agony Isaiah cried out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (v. 5). But in an instant he learned also the mercy of a God that forgave his sin and lifted him into such nearness to the divine presence that he heard God calling for a messenger and committed himself to the lifelong task of being that messenger. The description he sets down of his desperate task is perhaps colored by his experience of the nation's stubborn unwillingness to heed his message, but he may well have realized from the beginning how reluctant his people would be to hear a word of stern judgment and how small a remnant of believers would bear the responsibility for the future of Judah.

The holiness of God was central to Isaiah's thought. There were two sides to it: blessing and terror, healing and destruction. The gods that most men worshiped were gods with whom they could be on easy terms. Friendly or hostile, they were not too different in nature from the men themselves. The holiness of Yahweh, however, expressed the radical antithesis between God's nature and man's nature, and branded upon man's mind the conviction that his opposition to God was sin, rebellion, and unfaithfulness both to God and to his own true humanity. Therefore, God's holiness was the terror of sinful humanity. But at the same time it was man's only hope of a new and better life, for it was a call to holiness in which he would be healed of the sicknesses that were destroying him and would find blessing and rest. To resist the holiness of God was death, but to respond to it unconditionally in faith was the refounding of life. This was to be the core of Isaiah's message to Judah.

The Complexity of the Book. There are two basic collections of Isaiah's oracles, chs. 1 to 8 and chs. 28 to 31 (both of which

contain later additions), which most likely were reduced to writing by the prophet himself during periods when he withdrew from public activity. The stubborn unwillingness of King Ahaz and his princes to pay any heed to Isaiah's warnings and counsel in 734 B.C., when Israel and Syria marched against Judah and the king unwiseley sought help from Assyria, led to the prophet's first withdrawal (ch. 8:16-22). In this period of silence Isaiah set down his oracles for his disciples and waited for events to vindicate his words. The story of his call was an important part of this testimony, as was the story of his dealings with king and princes in the war crisis in chs. 7 and 8. The second collection, in chs. 28 to 31, was made after the Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C., when again the prophet, ignored by his people, heard a command from God to inscribe his oracles in a book (ch. 30:8-17). Scattered through the remainder of the book are other oracles of Isaiah from various periods, which must be given their proper location from internal evidence. Writings from later times have been not only added to but also interspersed with the writings of Isaiah. Blocks of material, such as chs. 24 to 27; 34 to 35; 36 to 39; 40 to 66, are easily recognized as having their origin later than the eighth century.

The Peril of Judah. Chapters 1 to 5 contain Isaiah's most searching critique of the conditions in Judah that made him fearful for the nation's future. His chief indictment is directed against the ruling class. He calls them murderous (ch. 1:21), rebels, and companions of thieves (v. 23). They seize the land that belongs by ancestral right to peasants in order to make vast estates for themselves (ch. 5:8). There they spend their time in drunken carousing (vs. 11-12, 22). They deck out their proud wives with a vulgarly ostentatious display of jeweled wealth (ch. 3:16-23), which they have gained by crushing the poor (vs. 14-15). If anyone dares to make ac-

The thesis of Isaiah, which his countrymen found so difficult to accept, was that a nation can live by faith alone, and that, when it abandons faith, it abandons the possibility of a future. In Israel to the north, Isaiah had a vivid example during these years of how the abandonment of faith could lead to national dissolution. But the same process was at work in Judah. The trust of the nation was not in its God but in its military preparedness (ch. 30:15), in its foreign alliances (chs. 20:1-6; 30:2; 31:1-5), and in its ability to placate God with sacrifices. Isaiah was certain that all three of these bases of confidence were false and would betray Judah. Judah's one possibility of survival was to hold fast to its unique destiny as a people in covenant with God through faith. Thus, in 734 b.c., when the king and people in Jerusalem were thrown into panic by the approach of the Syrian and Israelite armies, Isaiah sought out King Ahaz and gave him what must have seemed impractical counsel: "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint" (ch. 7:4). Ahaz refused to listen; his trust was in horses and chariots and not in God. Therefore, Isaiah promised him that because he and his people had refused "the waters of Shiloah that flow gently" and let themselves be governed by fear (ch. 8:6), they would bring upon themselves their own judgment in the person of the ruthless Assyrians. If only they had let the God of holiness be their fear, they would have been delivered from all other ruinous fears (vs. 11-13)!

A New Day of Peril. We hear Isaiah next more than twenty years later during the crisis occasioned by the revolt of Palestinian states against Assyria, suppressed by Sargon in 711 b.c. Apparently Isaiah went three years naked and barefoot "as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia" (ch. 20:3), warning his people that revolt would send them and their allies naked into a humiliating exile. The African states were

using the Palestinian states as a buffer for themselves against Assyria. To this period belongs the denunciation of an Ethiopian embassy, in ch. 18:1-6, the oracle concerning Egypt, in ch. 19:1-15, and perhaps also the picture of a devastated Judah, in ch. 1:5-9. Hezekiah participated in the revolt in spite of Isaiah's protest and was severely punished by Sargon.

The final crisis of Isaiah's ministry came in 701 B.C. Again Hezekiah had been drawn into a policy of revolt, hoping that Sennacherib, who ascended the Assyrian throne in 705 B.C., would prove a weaker king than Sargon. But he and his allies misjudged the situation. Sennacherib consolidated his home base, then in 701 B.C. turned his attention westward, subduing the rebels and marching to the very borders of Egypt. He overran the whole of Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. II Kings 18:13 to 19:37 (Isa., chs. 36; 37) tells the story with a very godly King Hezekiah as its hero, who placed his reliance upon God alone, with the encouragement of Isaiah, and was vindicated in his faith, not only by a miraculous angelic destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (Isa. 37:36), but also by the murder of Sennacherib on his return to Nineveh (v. 38). Assyrian records, however, show that Sennacherib lived another twenty years. The Greek historian Herodotus records an Egyptian legend of a hasty retreat of the Assyrian army from the border of Egypt, when mice, gnawing the bowstrings of the soldiers, rendered them helpless. More likely the sudden withdrawal resulted from news of revolts closer to the center of empire that required immediate attention.

The legendary character of the narrative makes it difficult to see clearly the part that Isaiah played in the crisis. It is clear from chs. 28 to 31, which belong to this period, that Isaiah did not capitulate to the popular confidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem. His warning remained unchanged—that an unrepentant nation was on the road to destruction and that the

ravages of the Assyrian were an explicit fulfillment of his earlier predictions. But he seems to have been convinced that Judah was to have one more chance and that Jerusalem, though besieged, would not be taken by Sennacherib (ch. 37:21-29). The Assyrian who worships his own might as his god (vs. 23-24) cannot forever escape the judgment that belongs to such blasphemy. Assyria may be the rod of God's anger for Judah (ch. 10:5), but the day must come when God will punish the pride of Assyria and break its power (chs. 10:12-19; 30:29-33; 31:8). But the deliverance of Jerusalem seems to have brought no honor or attention to Isaiah. Chapter 22:8-14 reveals that the siege accentuated the spirit of irresponsibility instead of driving the people to a deeper trust in God. The outcome for Isaiah was a second withdrawal from public activity in order to record his oracles as a testimony against the nation's obduracy (ch. 30:8-17).

For Isaiah it was only to faith that God could reveal what he was doing in the midst of history. God's purpose comprehends all nations, and one day the whole earth will be full of his praise. God is not to be hurried in the execution of his purpose. His way of working is beyond man's understanding. He has his times of rest and his times of action in history. Therefore, men must wait to see what he will yet do. Such waiting in total dependence upon God is faith and will give men calmness and dignity even in the most dangerous situations. The present time for Judah was one of purifying judgment, hard to bear, but Isaiah was able to endure it because beyond the judgment he saw the certainty of a new beginning (ch. 30:26). Though only a remnant were left, that remnant would become the seed of greater things (chs. 6:13; 7:21, 22). God would not plow Judah with judgment if he did not intend a new planting and a new harvest in the future. Most likely this hope for the future was centered upon

the prophetic group in Jerusalem that gathered round the prophet and found in his words the source of a sustaining faith (ch. 8:16). Perhaps this was God's new construction of which the cornerstone was already laid (ch. 28:16-17).

MICAH

Whether Micah and Isaiah were ever associated in their ministries we cannot tell, but it is hard to conceive of two men who had so much in common and who lived only twenty miles apart failing to meet. Their ministries have a common background. Micah depicts the same social evils: land-hungry nobles who fleece the peasants (chs. 2:2; 3:2-3), corrupt courts in which the poor man can no longer get justice (v. 11), dishonesty among the rulers (ch. 7:3), and a readiness even to murder in order to gain one's purpose (v. 2). Micah speaks also of a general breakdown of moral standards: No man's work is any longer to be trusted (ch. 6:12); traders make use of dishonest weights in order to cheat their customers (v. 11); conflict and general distrust make impossible any healthy relationships even within families (ch. 7:5-6). The official prophets come in for severe censure, being accused of adjusting their oracles in whatever way will be most profitable for them (ch. 3:5, 11). Like Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos, Micah repudiates sacrifices as having no virtue in them whatsoever. What God requires of man is not sacrifice but justice, mercy, and a humble walk in covenant with him. (Ch. 6:6-8.) What Micah cannot stand is the cheap piety of priests and prophets who talk of the nation's being safe because it has God in its midst, but who have no concern at all that God's will should be done in the common affairs of life (ch. 3:11).

When Micah began his ministry, Samaria was not yet destroyed (ch. 1:6). Beyond this it is difficult to fix the date of any oracle. Chapter 1:1 places Micah in the reigns of Jotham,

Ahaz, and Hezekiah, which covered a period of fifty years, so wide that it is of no help to us. Jeremiah 26:18 locates Micah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (Micah 3:12) in the reign of Hezekiah and attributes to him a considerable influence upon the conduct of the king. The approach of an invader is heralded (ch. 1:15) and exile is anticipated (ch. 2:13) after Jerusalem has been leveled with the ground. Undoubtedly the invader is the Assyrian, but there is no way of telling to which of his visits the prophecy refers, that of 722, or of 711, or of 701 B.C.

The Book of Micah, brief as it is, contains a number of later additions which, like those in Isaiah, envision a brighter future. Micah 4:1-8, which is in part identical with Isa. 2:2-5, pictures the final consummation of God's purpose, when the whole world shall have its center in Zion and under the rule of God's word men shall be delivered from the terrors of war. Chapter 4:11-13 strikes a vengeful note predicting a triumph of Judah over all its foes, in which it "shall beat in pieces many peoples." Chapter 5:2-9, inserted into an oracle of doom so that its intrusiveness is easily recognized, heralds deliverance from the Assyrian by a Davidic Messiah out of Bethlehem. Men of a later day who had tasted the bitterness of judgment were unable to read Micah's words without adding to them some indication of God's purpose for his people beyond the judgment.

THOUGH the Northern Kingdom was shattered in 722 B.C. and became an Assyrian province with a mixed population, Judah was to have another 135 years of life. But this was purchased only by payment of annual tribute to Assyria, and subordination to Assyria brought with it the introduction of Assyrian religious practices and the worship of Assyrian gods. In II Kings, ch. 21, King Manasseh, who reigned from 696 to 642 B.C., is reported to have reintroduced pagan cults into Judah and to have shed much innocent blood. His pro-Assyrian policy with its religious complications would bring him into conflict with the adherents of the Yahwist Party, and under him they suffered cruelly. Their opportunity came, however, after Manasseh's death. His son, Amon, was murdered by palace officials (II Kings 21:23) and the eight-year-old Josiah placed on the throne, apparently with the support of the Yahwist Party. This was possible because of the rapid decline of Assyria in the preceding period, which now opened the way for a more constructive program in Judah.

Tribute was no longer paid to Assyria, and the territory of Judah was expanded to include not only the Assyrian province of Israel but also Galilee beyond. Parallel with this was an elimination of all forms of Assyrian worship from the land.

This boldly independent policy came to an abrupt end when Josiah was killed by the Egyptians at Megiddo in 608 B.C. For a few years Egypt had the upper hand in Palestine, but in 605 B.C. the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar asserted his authority in the west, taking over the Assyrian empire. Egypt kept Judah in tumult by inciting its princes to revolt, which finally provoked the Babylonians to destroy all possibility of further trouble by a massive deportation in 598 B.C. and the demolition of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

NAHUM

The decline of Assyria and the prospect of the destruction of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, would be viewed with satisfaction in many quarters in Palestine. The notorious tyrant of the east was about to feel in his own flesh the cruel experiences of siege and conquest that he had inflicted on so many smaller nations. There was a prophet in Judah, Nahum of Elkosh, who expressed the feelings of his countrymen in vivid and biting poetry:

“Wasted in Nineveh; who will bemoan her?” (Ch. 3:7.)

Nineveh fell before the combined assaults of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C. The Assyrians retreated to Haran and held out for a few more years, but their empire was decisively shattered and was to be divided between their two conquerors. Some scholars think that Nahum’s oracles were composed in celebration of the event, others that he saw the event approaching and heralded it for the encouragement of his people.

In his first chapter, Nahum depicts God coming in judgment upon his adversaries, the mountains and hills melting before him, and his anger burning up his foes like thorn-bushes. The purpose of God’s coming is to liberate Judah (ch. 1:13). In chs. 2 and 3 the attack upon Nineveh and the hor-

rors of its fall are depicted graphically, as if the prophet were an observer of the scene.

The message of the book is not profound. The destruction of the Assyrian is for the prophet a vindication of God's righteous sovereignty. Cruel tyranny has at last brought upon itself the doom appropriate to it. But nowhere in Nahum is there any word of God's judgment upon Judah or any word of correction such as we find in the greater prophets.

ZEPHANIAH

Early in Josiah's reign a voice was raised against the corruptions of life in Judah while at the same time heralding the destruction of Assyria (Zeph. 2:13). Zephaniah seems to have belonged in the ranks of royalty, his genealogy being traced through five generations to King Hezekiah, but this did not hamper him in his indictment of dishonest judges and government officials in Jerusalem (ch. 3:3). He also attacked the prophets as wanton, faithless men, and the priests for profaning sacred things and doing violence to the law that they were appointed to maintain.

Nothing is known personally concerning Zephaniah except his royal lineage, which would make him a cousin of Josiah. His condemnation of officials and princes "who array themselves in foreign attire" (ch. 1:8) suggests that early in Josiah's reign the pro-Assyrian policy was still continuing. Zephaniah was among those who were working for a Judah free of foreign entanglements both politically and religiously.

Zephaniah pronounces terrifying judgments against Judah. God is coming in judgment upon the whole earth, and, as in the days of the Flood, man and beast will disappear (ch. 1:2-3). But it is the persistent idolatry and wickedness of Judah that merits his severest punishment. It infuriates the prophet that many in Judah say to themselves that they may do as

they like, since God will do nothing about it (v. 12). He warns them that soon they will see to their sorrow what God will do (vs. 14-18).

There is a word of hope, however, for a remnant in Judah. The prophet addresses "all you humble of the land" (chs. 2:3; 3:12) and promises them a rich inheritance in time to come. The proud and the wicked, whether they be Judeans, Philistines, or Assyrians, shall perish, but the humble who do no wrong and utter no lies (ch. 3:13) have before them a glorious future.

JEREMIAH

The prophet who was to see Judah through the stormy years of national catastrophe and, by his witness to God's purpose and his interpretation of events, point the way forward into a new era was Jeremiah. He has been misrepresented in the popular mind, his name being taken as synonymous with a gloomy complainer. He was a prophet of heroic stature, sensitive in nature so that he felt keenly the antagonisms in which his mission involved him, but resolute in purpose, letting nothing turn him aside from his duty to God and the nation. Far from being a prophet of blank despair, he was the one man who knew how Judah might have a future. There had to be demolition before there could be sound construction (Jer. 1:10). Thus Jeremiah was able to look beyond the disaster of the moment to the future redemption of a humbled nation.

We know more about both the inner and the outer life of Jeremiah than about that of any other prophet of Israel. Undoubtedly we owe this largely to the labors of his faithful disciple and secretary, Baruch, but Jeremiah himself must have been something of a diarist. We have a series of intimate prayers uttered by him in the agony of his soul at certain

crises of his life (chs. 11:18-22; 12:1-6; 14:7-9; 15:10, 15-21; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-12, 14-18), which let us know him from within in a most unusual way. Also, from Jeremiah's words and from Baruch's reports of his doings, we have an extensive account of the prophet's conflicts with various persons and parties within the community. We are able to follow the course of his life with reasonable clarity from the moment of his call in 626 B.C. to his final oracle to the refugee Jews who carried him with them to Egypt sometime after 586 B.C. The fifty-two chapters of his book are the product of a ministry of more than forty years.

Jeremiah grew up in Anathoth, a village four miles northeast of Jerusalem. Anathoth, though so close to Jerusalem, was in the land of Benjamin and therefore belonged traditionally in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, which accounts perhaps for the strong influence of Hosea upon Jeremiah. There was a priestly context to the early life of Jeremiah (ch. 1:1), but whether his own ancestors or only fellow townsmen were priests is not entirely clear. We read in I Kings 2:26 that the priest Abiathar was banished to Anathoth by Solomon. The fact that Jeremiah felt himself marked out for his task from birth may suggest that his childhood and youth in a priestly environment were preparation for his lifework, but the course that he followed as a prophet was to prove detestable to his family and townsmen (ch. 12:6). In the days of his most severe conflict they stood not with him but against him.

Jeremiah was still a very young man when in 626 B.C. he heard the call to become "a prophet to the nations" (ch. 1:5). The use of the plural term "nations" is puzzling, since the mission was to be almost wholly to Judah, but it corresponds to Jeremiah's breadth of vision concerning God's purpose. The God whom he served was Lord of the whole earth. The God of Judah could use the Babylonian to serve his pur-

pose for a time. All nations were his creatures and were responsible to him. His judgments could fall upon Ethiopians and Egyptians as well as upon Judeans. Jeremiah at first was impelled to draw back from the task committed to him. It was too difficult. But the promise of God to be with him, to put his words in his mouth, and to support him in the face of opposition gave him courage to begin.

Closely associated with the call are two visions. The first makes a play upon two similar-sounding words. Jeremiah sees a bare branch of an almond tree (*shāqed*), an early flowering tree, and hears God saying, "I am watching (*shōqed*) over my word to perform it" (vs. 11-12). To the outward eye it might seem as if God were doing nothing to validate his word, but its flowering and fulfillment is as sure and speedy as the flowering of the almond branch. In the second vision Jeremiah sees a pot bubbling over a fire. It is not clear whether it is the face of the pot or the fire that is turned toward the north, but the meaning is plain: that evil is shortly to break out of the north upon Judah. This northern peril, which is frequently mentioned throughout the oracles (chs. 4:6; 6:1; 10:22; 13:20; 25:9), has been variously interpreted, sometimes as a Scythian invasion to which reference is made by the Greek historian Herodotus, sometimes as a Babylonian invasion. But any such identification is not only highly uncertain but also unnecessary. It is sufficient that in Judah's past experience trouble usually came out of the north. Jeremiah's prediction of disaster was not based on the approach of a foreign army but rather upon the internal state of the nation. It was disorder and unfaithfulness to God in the nation's life that made the prophet certain that a day of trouble was imminent.

Jeremiah and the Problem of Reform. The period of Jeremiah's ministry concerning which we are most uncertain is

that which falls within the reign of King Josiah, from 626 to 608 B.C. The prophet was much more favorably disposed toward Josiah than toward his son Jehoiakim (ch. 22:15-17), which has made it hard for some scholars to believe that the earliest oracles of judgment could be against the Judah of Josiah. But approval of the king would not necessarily make a prophet lenient toward the sins of princes, prophets, priests, and judges.

There is a distinct difference in tone between chs. 1 to 6 and the remainder of the book. From ch. 7 on, Jeremiah becomes a clearly etched figure, and his words cut like knives into specific evils in the life of the nation, but in chs. 1 to 6 the indictment of the nation remains more vague and general. Idolatry is condemned; Judah has committed the folly of deserting Yahweh, the fountain of living waters, and of turning to idols, which are like cracked cisterns that will hold no water (ch. 2:13). Judah's sin is described as harlotry, and the language is reminiscent of Hosea. In fact, in these early chapters the influence of Hosea is everywhere evident. These may therefore be the products of the earliest period, when the young prophet was most under the spell of his fellow northerner and had not yet achieved his own fully distinctive message and ministry. It is also significant that often in these early oracles Jeremiah addresses Israel as well as Judah, including within the scope of his ministry the northern Assyrian province that was now being claimed by Josiah.

The most controversial question concerning this early period is whether or not Jeremiah supported the reform movement initiated by Josiah in 621 B.C. II Kings, chs. 22 and 23, narrates the finding of a law book in the Temple at a time when certain repairs were being effected. This law book is generally agreed to have been the nucleus of The Book of Deuteronomy. It awakened the king and his princes to the

enormity of Judah's sin in repudiating its covenant relationship with God. A solemn new covenant was exacted of representatives of the nation, and a program was launched to clear away every vestige of idolatry. As one measure in accomplishing this, all local sanctuaries were to be suppressed and the worship of the nation centralized in the Jerusalem Temple. It is difficult to think that a prophet would fail to support such a program, and *Jer. 11:1-8* has sometimes been interpreted as proof that Jeremiah made a tour of the cities of Judah to encourage the reform. This, however, is by no means certain. "This covenant," in vs. 2 and 6, may refer not to Josiah's covenant but to the Mosaic covenant, which was basic to the entire prophetic tradition.

One thing is certain: whatever Jeremiah's attitude may have been when the reform program was launched, he very soon recognized it as a superficial reform of the externals of religion and not a cleansing of the nation's heart and life such as God desired. Prophets and priests who supported the reform movement were condemned by him as "healing the wound of my people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (*ch. 6:14*). The constant repetition of the word "false" by Jeremiah is significant: false law, false priests, false prophets, false friends, a false return to God. He was distrustful of the new religious surface of life in Judah that concealed an actual rebellion of the nation against God. This falsity and hypocrisy made Judah's situation more hopeless even than that of Israel (*ch. 3:11*). Israel's sin was un concealed and repentance was possible (*v. 12*), but Judah had made the pretense of a return to God (*v. 10*), which was now an obstacle in the way of a true return.

There is no need to suppose that Jeremiah was blind to this superficial character of the reform movement from the very beginning. He represents himself as having had to resist the

whole nation, friend and foe alike, throughout his entire ministry. We can appreciate better the alienation of his friends and family if we realize that the reform movement was closely tied in with the political movement to reunite the northern Assyrian provinces with Judah and to restore the dimensions of the kingdom on a scale that would rival the united kingdom of David and Solomon. The suppression of all northern sanctuaries (II Kings 23:15-20) and the centralization of worship in Jerusalem were essential parts of the reunification program. It would be dangerous for a prophet to oppose such a popular nationalist movement.

What Jeremiah saw very clearly was that the flagrant idolatries of the past were being exchanged for a more respectable idolatry in which men put their trust not in God but in the Jerusalem Temple itself (ch. 7:4). The correct performance of the ritual was regarded as guaranteeing the favor of God toward Judah. The prophets assured the people that God would now send them peace and prosperity (ch. 14:13-14). The death of Josiah in 608 B.C. and the accession of his son Jehoiakim to the throne apparently removed all restraint from the Nationalist Party. Jehoiakim, with exuberant confidence but little concern about the economic condition of Judah, began to build himself a great palace and thereby earned the biting scorn of Jeremiah (ch. 22:13, 19). Jehoiakim must have winced at the prophet's words concerning him: "With the burial of an ass shall he be buried, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (v. 19).

Patriot or Traitor? At this juncture Jeremiah delivered the Temple address, which is twice reported with differing details (chs. 7; 26). In it he condemned the hypocrisy of the national religion centered in the Temple and announced the coming destruction of the Temple. The priests and prophets were outraged and demanded his death (ch. 26:11), but he found

support among the princes (v. 16). Another prophet, Uriah, who made the same prophecy, had to flee to Egypt and was brought back to die. Jeremiah's escape from death was attributed to the support of Prince Ahikam, whose son, Gedaliah, was to be governor of Judah after 586 B.C. It is likely that at this time Jeremiah learned of a conspiracy against his life in which both Jerusalemites and men of his own village of Anathoth were involved (ch. 11:9, 18-23). Perhaps his fellow townsmen were so embarrassed by his seeming treason that they lent themselves to a secret scheme to rid the land of him.

Throughout Jehoiakim's reign of eleven years Jeremiah maintained his critique of the nation and his insistence that soon its sin and folly must bring catastrophe. For a time he was barred from speaking publicly in the Temple (ch. 36:5), but he dictated his oracles to Baruch, who read them in the Temple (v. 10) in the chamber of Gemariah, a brother of Ahikam. A son of Gemariah, Micaiah, then took the document to a council of princes in the palace, who had sufficient sympathy with Jeremiah to have it read to the king. The king, however, scorned the words of Jeremiah, and, as they were read, cut the scroll into strips and burned them in the brazier that was blazing before him. Jeremiah then wrote a second and larger scroll.

In 598 B.C. Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin, who succeeded to the throne on his father's death, was taken captive to Babylon with 3,000 of his aristocracy, and his uncle Zedekiah was appointed king in his stead by the Babylonians. But the general situation continued to deteriorate. In a vision (ch. 24) Jeremiah saw two baskets of figs, one good and one rotten, and these he interpreted as symbolic of the two communities, the one in Babylon and the other in Judah. Not because the exiles were more virtuous but because the judgment had already fallen full upon them, he saw the prospect of a new day for

them; but for the unrepentant kingdom of Zedekiah there was no hope. There were prophets in the community of exiles encouraging them to hope for a speedy return to Palestine. Jeremiah wrote condemning the falsity of such prophecies and counseling the exiles to settle down for many years to come. The passages limiting the exile to seventy years (chs. 25:11; 29:10) are almost certainly the work of a postexilic editor, as also are a number of passages that envisage the ingathering of exiles in a Messianic Age (such as chs. 23:3-8; 30:9; 33:17-21). But Jeremiah was confident that beyond the day of judgment lay a new beginning for Judah (chs. 24:6; 29:32; 31:23-24; 32:15). First, however, must come the judgment, the pressing of the clay of Judah back into a lump that the Potter might shape it afresh (ch. 18:1-11).

Because Jeremiah saw no hope for Judah as long as the kingdom stood, he counseled the nation to surrender when Zedekiah by rebellion brought the Babylonian army against Judah. Thereby once more he laid himself open to the charge that he was a traitor (ch. 20:1-6). The priest, Pashhur, had him put in the stocks as punishment for uttering such prophecies in the precincts of the Temple. The princes became as furious against him as the priests. He was accused of deserting to the enemy when he merely left the city to visit Anathoth, and was beaten and imprisoned. Curiously, it was now Zedekiah himself who saved the prophet's life more than once, protecting him from the princes (chs. 37:16-21; 38:10-13). In one instance the special care of an Ethiopian eunuch for Jeremiah impelled the king to order his rescue from a cistern in which he had been left to die. Nevertheless, Jeremiah warned Zedekiah of a terrible fate awaiting him unless he changed his policy.

In this time of despair Jeremiah proclaimed his confidence in a future for Judah beyond the judgment by purchasing a

family property in Anathoth (ch. 32:6-25). When the city fell, in 586 B.C., he counseled the survivors to remain in Judah, and Gedaliah, the son of his friend Ahikam, was made governor by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was treated kindly by the conquerors and given his choice of going to Babylon or remaining in Judah (chs. 39:11 to 40:4). He chose to remain with Gedaliah. But the day of violence was not yet over. Soon Gedaliah was murdered, and the remaining princes, fearing the wrath of the Babylonians, fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them against his will. There we hear him still at his task as a prophet exposing the faithlessness of some of the exiles who had reverted to the worship of the queen of heaven, the fertility cult that had long been the chief rival of Yahweh in Palestine (ch. 44).

The Ordeal and Triumph of Faith. The prayers of Jeremiah take us into the very soul of the man. We hear his cry to God for help when his fellow townsmen were plotting against his life (ch. 11:18-20). We hear him complaining to God when his enemies prosper, and receiving from God the answer that before he is through he will have much more difficult experiences than this to endure (ch. 12:1-6). We hear him pleading with God for his nation (ch. 14:7-9). We learn that sometimes in his pain and loneliness he wondered if God were deceiving him (ch. 15:15-21). Once he decided that he would speak God's word no more (ch. 20:7-12, 14-18) only to discover that it was so much his life that he could no longer live without yielding himself to its service. He was unconditionally the servant of God's word for life no matter what it might cost him in suffering.

The story of Jeremiah seems outwardly to be a succession of failures. He seems never to have won the day in his mission to Judah. Yet his failure was the means of God's triumph. By his faithfulness as a prophet the nation was given a light

to guide it through the darkness of catastrophe and exile and to point it forward to its destiny in the future. When he heralded a new covenant that would one day be written not on tablets of stone but in his people's hearts (ch. 31:31-34), he was projecting into the future the relation with God that was already the foundation of his own existence and the only hope of Israel. Jeremiah was in himself the one sure sign of the new day that God had in store for his people. More than once it is as if we were catching glimpses in anticipation of the very form of Jesus Christ.

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THE deportation of three thousand Judeans to Babylonia in 598 B.C. had as its purpose the removal of all those in the community who might be inclined to support another revolt against Babylonian authority. King Jehoiachin and his household would be the first to go, then his princes, then the leading men of business. But the Babylonians were astute enough to know that religious leaders, such as priests and prophets, often played a major part in forming public policy. So they were included in the deportation. Since Jeremiah had tried to discourage the spirit of revolt, he was allowed to remain in Jerusalem. From Jer., ch. 29, we learn the names of prophets who went with the exiles to Babylon — Ahab, son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, son of Maaseiah — who, with their intense nationalistic fervor, kept their countrymen from settling down for a long stay in the foreign land, assuring them constantly that soon they would be back in their homes. There would, however, be others among the prophets and priests in whom the disaster would have a very different effect. These Judeans were tasting the ruin predicted by the prophets, and the fruits were bitter. But it would have been strange if among the three thousand exiles there had been no one whose ears were

opened by the tragedy to hear what the covenant God of Israel was saying to his people in the events of their history.

EZEKIEL

Among the priests in the community of exiles in Tel-abib by the River Chebar was one named Ezekiel. He was never to lose his interest in the Temple, its ritual, and its priesthood (chs. 40 to 48), but in the first five years of exile he became much more open to the teaching of the great prophets concerning what Yahweh required of a people in covenant with him. That it took five years for him to hear the call to be a different kind of prophet to his people from Ahab and Zedekiah shows how long a spiritual journey he had to make before he was ready for the task. Perhaps he was among those who kept hoping for some miraculous deliverance, believing that the God of Israel could not let his own people be put to shame, and therefore refusing to bow under the crushing judgment of God. But, as the years passed, that hope could no longer be maintained. The danger then was an abandonment of faith. If Yahweh could not protect his people from the Babylonians, it might be wiser to worship some more powerful god. We know that the Judeans who later fled to Egypt argued in this fashion (Jer. 44:17-18). It would deepen the despair when reports from Palestine told that things were going from bad to worse. Perhaps also some of the exiles began to make themselves at home in Babylonia and to adopt not only Babylonian customs but also Babylonian religious practices. They had considerable freedom and apparently could establish homes and businesses. It was a wholly new situation demanding a wholly new word of guidance from God. But the guiding word was not being spoken — until the priest Ezekiel had a vision of Yahweh, the God of Israel, present in his living power in the plains of Babylonia and calling for a

man to speak for him to Israel!

The Call of Ezekiel. Ezekiel's visionary call (ch. 1) may seem to the modern reader fantastic in its complexity and queerness. He saw a stormy wind from the north bearing a great cloud, which had brightness all about it, fire flashing forth from it, and in its midst what seemed to be gleaming bronze. Cloud and fire were symbols of the presence of God. As the cloud approached he saw in it four figures with the bodies of men, but with wings, and each with four faces like those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. The four creatures were turned outward and beneath them were wheels within wheels that carried them wherever they wished to go. Above the four creatures was a firmament clear as crystal and upon the firmament a throne with a majestic person seated upon it whose presence was the source of all the blazing light.

Many elements enter into this vision, some of them incomprehensible to us, but if we are to understand it at all we must grasp what exile from his own land did to the ordinary Judean. He was accustomed to think of Yahweh as especially the God of a people in a certain portion of Palestine. That was Yahweh's land and Yahweh's people. Other lands and other peoples belonged to other gods. Exile from Palestine meant exile from the presence of Yahweh. In Ps. 42 and 43, a man of deep faith feels himself shut out from the presence of Yahweh because he is unable to appear before him in the courts of the Jerusalem Temple. The cry of the exile was, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:4). Ezekiel's vision brought him the realization that Yahweh was in Babylonia as truly as he was in Judah. The universality of his presence may be symbolized by the faces of the four creatures turned toward the four corners of the earth and the wheels beneath them ready to move in any direction. What matters above all is that the sovereign God is

present in his majesty and power, able to give his people a future in spite of every obstacle, but a God of righteousness and holiness dwelling in light and requiring of a people in covenant with him that they should forsake utterly the works of darkness. Before his God Ezekiel fell on his face in reverence and devotion (ch. 1:26-28).

God's first command to him was to stand upon his feet that he might speak to him, and, with God's speaking to him, God's Spirit entered into him, setting him upon his feet and opening his ears to God. Then he received his commission as a prophet, not only to the exiles but to the whole house of Israel in its rebellion against God. Ezekiel was warned not to expect any sudden change in the rebellious attitude of the nation; he was to discharge his mission whether there was any response or not. The account of the commissioning was repeated in a symbolic vision in which Ezekiel saw a hand reaching down to him a scroll on which were written on both sides oracles of doom (ch. 2:9). This scroll he had to eat, so that its contents would become part of his very being. But surprisingly, when he had eaten it he found it "sweet as honey" (ch. 3:3). The word of doom was sweet to Ezekiel because beyond the doom lay the promise of a new beginning for God's people.

Yet another element in Ezekiel's call is his likening of his task to that of a watchman (ch. 3:17-21). In the unfolding of the story of the call, he at first received only a message of judgment upon the stubborn sin of the nation. Overwhelmed by it, he sat silent among the exiles for seven days, filled with the burning wrath of God. Only at the end of that time did he grasp the full nature of his prophetic task and know himself called to be a watchman and shepherd over his people. Like the watchman on the wall of the city he must be on guard against anything that may bring harm to the commu-

nity. Each person in it is his responsibility. Here we meet the profoundest conception of pastoral care. The prophet must consider himself responsible to God not simply for the nation as a whole but for the individuals within the nation. Let any person follow the way of wickedness and receive no warning from the prophet where this road leads, and the punishment of that person's sin will fall upon the prophet. Paul was to be influenced by this awesome conception of the pastoral office (Acts 20:26). We hear the same note struck in Ezekiel's denunciation of false prophets (ch. 34:1-10). In telling what the false prophets do and do not do, he indirectly paints the portrait of a true prophet. The true prophet is more concerned with feeding the flock than with feeding himself. He strengthens the weak among the sheep and has skill to cure the sick. Those who are crippled by injuries he binds up, and he goes in search of the lost and straying. He rules his flock with gentleness and keeps them from being scattered on the hills, where they will be torn to pieces by wild beasts. Surely this is no ideal picture that Ezekiel paints but is rather a description of the office of prophet as he himself learned to discharge it among the exiles by the River Chebar.

The Strangeness of the Book. There are many puzzling features about The Book of Ezekiel that have led to wide divergencies among scholars in its interpretation. It is indeed strange to find chs. 3 to 24, which follow upon the account of the call, occupied exclusively with pronouncements of judgment against the Jerusalem community with no word concerning the exiles in Tel-abib. Chapters 25 to 32 and 35 consist of oracles against Ammon, Tyre, Egypt, and Edom, and chs. 38 and 39 of oracles against Gog of Magog, a seemingly mythical nation. Chapters 40 to 48 are mainly an ideal reconstruction of Temple and land in Palestine. Thus only in chs. 33; 34; 36; and 37 does Ezekiel seem to turn his attention to

the people among whom he was living and even there he does not focus upon them as former prophets did. Rarely are we conscious of the prophet directly at work in his own community. Perhaps the explanation of this is that he took the whole scattered nation as his care and directed his attention where he thought it to be most needed. Ezekiel's detailed knowledge of what was going on in Jerusalem and in the Temple precincts there, does not require that he should have been actually present; correspondence between Palestine and Babylonia kept the two communities in touch with each other.

There are puzzling features also in Ezekiel's visions. He tells how the Spirit took him by the hair of his head, lifted him up between earth and heaven, and transported him to Jerusalem (ch. 8:3) to see the pagan ceremonies being performed in the Temple. But surely this is a visionary's emphatic way of saying that even the sins of Judeans at a distance are not hidden from him. Again he describes himself as bound so that he cannot leave his house and dumb so that he cannot reprove the rebellious nation (ch. 3:25-27). Not until seven years later, when news of the fall of Jerusalem arrives in Babylonia, is this dumbness taken away so that he is free to speak (ch. 33:21-22; see also ch. 24:25-27). During these years he would have to deliver his oracles in writing. His silence and confinement were an ominous portent of the judgment of God to the community. It would be no obstacle, however, to his dispatch of oracles in writing to Judeans in Palestine and elsewhere.

Free use was made by Ezekiel of the acted parable, perhaps because of his silence. In ch. 4 he builds a miniature city of Jerusalem and depicts its siege. In ch. 5 he cuts off his hair and beard with a sharp sword and disposes of it in three parts, which represent three aspects of the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In ch. 12 he acts out the drama of people

leaving their homes and going into exile. In ch. 24:15, when his wife dies he refuses to weep for her, and his action becomes a parable that no tears are to be shed for the death of Jerusalem. In ch. 37:15-23 he joins two sticks, with the names of Israel and Judah written on them, into one, symbolizing the hope for a future union of the divided segments of the nation. In line with this is his use of vivid and daring imagery, at times breath-taking in its dramatic character. He does not merely hear God's word but eats the roll on which it is written. He is not merely transported by the Spirit to Jerusalem but is lifted up by the hair of the head by the Spirit to make the journey. The description of skeletons in the valley of dry bones (ch. 37) being raised to life and clothed with flesh is the product of the same exuberant imagination, and so also is the vision of life-giving water (ch. 47:1-13) that, rising in the Holy of Holies of the Temple where God dwells in sovereignty, flows under the walls and down through the wilderness of Judah into the Dead Sea, transforming the desert into a garden and healing the waters of the sea so that they become filled with fish. Ezekiel brought into the service of his God a dramatic talent of no mean dimension.

Hope for the Future. The coming of a final doom upon Jerusalem in 586 B.C. liberated Ezekiel and enabled him to turn from judgment to promise. He was quite aware of the continued unrighteousness of the community. The exiles deserved only judgment, for they had profaned God's name. (Ch. 36:16-20.) But because God could not let his own purpose fail, there would yet be a day of restoration for Israel. For his own sake God would gather his people from exile and in their own land would cleanse them, giving them a new heart and a new spirit. Nowhere does Ezekiel strike a deeper note than when, recognizing that God's judgment has left the people unrepentant, he hazards the hope that in days

to come God's mercy, his completely undeserved mercy, may bring them to repentance (v. 31). Chapter 37 heralds the resurrection power of God's Spirit in the midst of a people as good as dead.

One important principle enunciated by Ezekiel was the responsibility of the individual for his own life before God. "The soul that sins shall die . . . but the righteous man shall save his soul alive." (Chs. 3:18-21; 33:18-20.) The sense of involvement in the total community was integral in Israel's faith. No man could cut himself apart from his fellow man and deny that he was his brother's keeper. The sin of the nation rested as a burden of guilt upon every citizen. But in the hour of catastrophe this led to despair and to an obliteration of essential distinctions. What difference did it make whether a man was righteous or unrighteous, since all alike were going to their doom? In this situation Ezekiel insisted upon the responsibility of every individual before God. Every man will be judged according to the decisions he himself has made in the hour of crisis. The son will not die for the sins of the father or the mother for the sins of the daughter. Each must answer for his own life to God.

The final section of Ezekiel's book (chs. 40 to 48), in which he lays out an ideal order not only for the Temple but for the whole of Palestine, may seem out of character in a book of prophecy, but it is a reminder that Ezekiel never ceased to be a priest and to retain his priestly concern. A future without the Temple was to him an impossibility. The nation restored would be a holy nation with a holy God and a holy Temple of God at the center of its life. This pattern drawn by Ezekiel was to exert a powerful influence in the days of reconstruction and was no small factor in the creation of a Judaism in which the Jerusalem priesthood and Temple were dominant.

OBADIAH

The tiny book of Obadiah, only twenty-one verses in length, belongs in the context of Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's pronouncements of doom upon neighbors of Judah who profited by its downfall. Ezekiel twice thunders against Edom (Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:1-15), and Jeremiah once (Jer. 49:7-22). The first nine verses of Obadiah are almost identical with a portion of Jeremiah's oracle and have parallels also in The Book of Joel. Judah had good reason to cry out for judgment upon Edom, for in the chaotic conditions that followed upon the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. the Edomites had callously utilized the opportunity to plunder their helpless and unfortunate neighbors. Bonds of brotherhood out of the distant past meant nothing. In fairness to Edom it must be remembered that more than once it had been violently incorporated into the Kingdom of Judah. The Book of Obadiah must therefore be read in part as a cry for vengeance upon an enemy and in part as an assertion of faith that cruelty and wickedness must one day have their reward. The book concludes upon this latter note, "And the kingdom shall be the Lord's." The fall of Edom is not to be an end in itself but merely a clearing of the way for the establishment of God's righteous Kingdom in Palestine.

Nothing is known of Obadiah beyond the name, which means "servant of Yahweh." The date of the book may be almost any time in the sixth or fifth century.

HABAKKUK

The Book of Habakkuk differs from other prophetic books in that it seems rather to contemplate a problem of faith than to consist of separate oracles to the nation. The problem on which the book centers was created by the triumph of Babylon,

a nation that blatantly worshiped its own power as divine and therefore blasphemed against God (Hab. 1:16). If God was holy and righteous so that his judgment must fall upon all unholiness and unrighteousness, then how was it possible for the Babylonian empire to prosper as it plainly did? This was a source of great perplexity for faithful believers in the days of exile.

The prophet begins by posing his problem on a lesser scale. He re-creates the situation that preceded the coming of the Babylonian as if he himself were in it and crying out to God against the helplessness of the righteous man in the midst of a wicked nation. God seems to do nothing to save the righteous man and to punish the wicked. But, lo, on the horizon appears the Babylonian (Chaldean), an instrument of God for the destruction of the wicked. Thus the problem in its first form is resolved only to be re-created in a new and more painful form. The whole nation must have been asking Habakkuk's question: How can a just God permit the continued prosperity and power of this godless tyrant? (v. 13).

In ch. 2 the prophet mounts his watchtower to wait for an answer from God. Here he is exercising the intercessory function of the prophet—speaking on the nation's behalf to God and persisting in prayer until he has his answer. At last it comes: "Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (ch. 2:4). In short, it is what a man is within himself and with God that ultimately determines his destiny. That destiny may be concealed for a while, but it will be revealed in time. God is not to be hurried in his judgments, but he may be trusted to be just and to vindicate his righteous will in the events of history.

The psalm in ch. 3 is most likely a later addition to the book. It is not present in the commentary on Habakkuk discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. But the editor who

added it had a fine sense of appropriateness. In vivid poetic language it represents God marching forth like a man of war to defeat his enemies and bring salvation to his people. God will yet show himself sovereign among the nations. Faith will not be disappointed of its victory. Then comes the moving confession of the psalmist that, because this is his faith, no temporal defeat or hardship can drive him to despair.

"Though the fig tree do not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation."
(Vs. 17-18.)

No other words could better express the triumphant, unconquerable faith of the prophets of Israel.

WITH the destruction of Jerusalem, life became very difficult in Palestine, and the inhabitants were at the mercy of their hostile and rapacious neighbors. But a very considerable portion of the population remained in the land and carried on as best they could. The Book of Jeremiah (ch. 44) reports a migration to Egypt after 586 b.c., and the papyrus documents discovered at Elephantine in southern Egypt supply a record of a Jewish community there early in the fifth century composed of mercenary soldiers and businessmen and with its own temple for worship. The exiles from Israel in 734 and 722 b.c. were settled by the Assyrians in Media and elsewhere. It is clear also that after 586 b.c. the nation was scattered in many different lands and continued for centuries to have at least three centers of thought and worship: Babylonia, Egypt, and Palestine. A prophet who desired to address the nation would have to communicate his message in writing to other communities than the one in which he was living.

From Ezekiel and Jeremiah and from the Elephantine papyri, it is evident that neither the Deuteronomic reform nor the catastrophic end of the kingdom brought idolatrous practices to an end. Jeremiah's companions in Egypt thought they would profit more from the worship of the queen of heaven

than from the worship of Yahweh. The papyri depict a female deity being worshiped alongside Yahweh in the temple at Elephantine. Ezekiel accuses his fellow Jews both in Judah and in Babylonia of reverting to idolatry. The exile most certainly did not produce a sudden transformation in the religious character of the nation, as has sometimes been supposed. The problem of idolatry remained and so also did the problem with which Jeremiah had wrestled: the problem of religious leaders who, although they kept themselves free from pagan idolatry, exalted the cultic forms of the nation's worship and offered peace with God on lesser terms than justice, mercy, and unconditional obedience to God in the ordinary daily concerns of life.

Disciples of the prophets would be found in all three centers of Jewish life, and among them the writings of the master prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries would be preserved. The national disaster would lend unusual authority to the words of these prophets, and their writings would help to keep alive communities of faith in which not only the words but also the spirit of the prophets would be treasured and remembered.

A whole new generation grew up before any significant event occurred to change the situation. In 539 B.C., however, the capture of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian brought into operation a radically new policy toward subject peoples. Cyrus believed that his empire would be better ordered by less regimentation and more freedom for each people within his borders to maintain its own national life and institutions. Exiled populations received permission to return to their homelands, the Jews among them. But not all desired to return, for some had become more prosperous in their new homes than they had been in the old. Many of the Jews would remember the hardships of life on the rocky hills of Palestine. But some

had their hearts set still on a destiny to be fulfilled by their nation, and the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah meant more to them than any personal gain. According to The Book of Ezra there was an expedition from Babylon to Judah in 538 B.C. (ch. 1). The author of Ezra probably overemphasizes the importance of this return of exiles in order to support his theory that the main stream of Israel's faith was diverted to Babylonia by the exile but flowed back to Judah in 538 B.C. But the tradition of a return of exiles is undoubtedly sound.

THE SECOND ISAIAH

About the middle of the sixth century, when it must have seemed as if all hope for a restoration of national life was past, a new prophet heard God's call to minister to his scattered people. What his name was or where he lived is unknown, but, because his writings became attached to The Book of Isaiah (chs. 40 to 66), he is generally known as the Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah. It is not difficult to recognize in these twenty-seven chapters the work of another prophet than the Isaiah of the eighth century. The fact that the city and Temple of Jerusalem are in ruins and the nation is scattered across the world indicates a date later than 586 B.C. References to Cyrus (chs. 44:28; 45:1) and predictions of the fall of Babylon (chs. 46; 47) place the author more definitely in the period just before 539 B.C. Moreover, the poetic style of the book and its dominant themes are so distinctive that they set the author apart from all other prophets.

There is a sharp difference in setting and tone between chs. 40 to 55 and chs. 56 to 66 that has led many scholars to interpret them as the work of two prophets. Chapters 40 to 55 give little indication of the community to which they were addressed, while chs. 56 to 66 are clearly spoken to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Chapters 40 to 55 seem composed to be

read rather than spoken, while most of the oracles in chs. 56 to 66 have in them the directness of oral delivery. But the language and thought of the two are indistinguishable. The differences may be explained by seeing these two sections as coming from two distinct periods in the ministry of one prophet. During the first period, before 539 B.C., the prophet set down his messages in writing and sent them to his scattered fellow countrymen, and, because he was not addressing any single community, there is no clear indication in these chapters where he himself resided. Some evidence points to Babylon, some to Palestine, but none of it is conclusive. During the second period the prophet discharged his ministry in the Jerusalem community that was confronted with the problems of reconstruction. He did not relinquish his interest in his countrymen in other lands, but his primary task now was to wrestle with forces in the life of Jerusalem that threatened in this new day to blind the people of God to their true destiny. Approached from this standpoint the twenty-seven chapters become a close-knit unity (ch. 35 should be included with them), and developments in the second part of the book are found to throw a clear light upon difficult passages in the first part, particularly upon the interpretation of ch. 53.

Faith's Vision of a New Future. Two features of this prophet's distinctive character must be recognized in order to read his writings with understanding. One is the highly dramatic quality of his presentation of his thought. The reader must constantly ask who is speaking and who is being spoken to. Sometimes God addresses Israel; sometimes he addresses the nations; again, the prophet speaks in his own person. Two or three changes may take place within a single chapter. A second feature, which has not always been appreciated, is the intensity and vividness of the prophet's hope for the future, his expectation of an intervention of God at any moment to vin-

dicate his purpose for Israel. The closest parallel to it is the state of tense expectancy in the early Christian church. By some scholars this hope for a coming of God has been reduced to mere poetic embroidery on a prosaic confidence that soon Cyrus will open the way for the return of exiles to Palestine. But the return of exiles is merely one element in the prophet's hope; he reaches out eagerly for a coming of God in judgment and mercy to defeat all his enemies and to transform the life of his depressed people into the glorious life of his Kingdom. His heart is set not on any mere external return and restoration but on the spiritual transformation of the nation to lay hold upon its destiny as the servant people of God.

Second Isaiah was a prophet to a nation in despair. Forty years or more had passed since the destruction of Jerusalem. Surely the nation had received more than its just punishment for all its sins (ch. 40:2)! Yet there was no sign of the restoration beyond the judgment as promised by Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. More and more the conviction grew that Yahweh had cast Israel off forever. On every side it was said: "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God" (ch. 40:27). We may perhaps have a glimpse into Second Isaiah's own mind in the time before his call in ch. 40:6, where, in response to God's command to preach, he first expresses complete hopelessness. There is no purpose in preaching since "all flesh is grass" and withers when God breathes on it. But he is saved from despair by a newborn confidence in the sureness of God's word (ch. 40:8). By God's word he means the revelation of God's purpose in Israel through the prophets of the past. What God has spoken he will do. As rain descends from heaven and waters the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, so God's word accomplishes God's purpose in the midst of the world. (Ch. 55: 10-11.)

More than any other prophet Second Isaiah looks to the past in order to renew his confidence in the future. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn," he cries. "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you." (Ch. 51:1-2.) He recalls the exodus and in it finds the promise of a new deliverance that is at hand. He bases everything on the nature of God as revealed to Israel. What God has been, he is and will be. Therefore, there must be a future for the nation as the chosen instrument of God's purpose.

A central doctrine of Second Isaiah is the election of Israel as the servant of God's word and purpose in the world, in which he lays the foundations of the Christian doctrine of the church. He repudiates decisively any conception of Israel's having a claim upon God or of Israel's being elect because of its virtue and superiority. Israel is chosen and continues to be God's chosen people in spite of its blindness and stubborn sin. (Chs. 41:8-10; 42:18-25; 43:8-13; 48:1-11.) The sin and blindness that brought upon the nation such fearful judgments are still present. But God, for his own sake, that his purpose for man may not be defeated, will set Israel at the beginning of a new day.

The basis of Israel's election is that in its midst God has spoken his word; therefore, Israel justifies its election by the ministry of that word (ch. 49:1-3). But the future to which that points is not merely a restoration of Israel: it is a far more glorious day in which God's sovereignty over the nations will be established and they will participate in the blessedness of a transformed world (42:5-12). Second Isaiah bases his hope not on the rise of Cyrus, nor on any calculation of possible historical developments, but on God. The darkness of the present hour loses its destructiveness and becomes bearable because of his certainty concerning what God must do. Faith, therefore, is a "waiting upon God," and the prophet

Restoration

discovers first for himself and then for his people that by such faith a man is enabled to live (ch. 40:31).

Triumph Through Suffering. Second Isaiah expected and found resistance to his ministry among those of the nation who, in their despair, had returned to idolatrous practices. The polemic against idolatry and against pagan practices of the most gruesome kind is constant throughout the book. The scorn and biting sarcasm with which the prophet scourges the folly of the idolaters would not make them love him, and from ch. 50 on there is evidence of bitter conflict between him and them. What provoked him most were the Israelites who professed to be worshipers of Yahweh (ch. 48:1-2) but who actually set their trust upon some idol. In ch. 50:2 there is evidence that the nation turned a deaf ear to the glowing words of the prophet. God says, "When I came, there was no man; when I called, there was no one to answer." This was not entirely true, for the prophet does speak of those who fear the Lord and obey the voice of his servant (v. 10), but the opposition was strong.

Chapter 50:4-11 may be interpreted as spoken by Israel as the servant of God or by the prophet himself. The latter seems to give the most natural force to the words. First the prophet describes his function as an evangelist of God to a despairing people. Daily he listens for a word from God that will strengthen the faltering faith of his brothers. But when he speaks this word he receives a storm of abuse. He is publicly insulted. In the street men spit in his face and pull his beard. In v. 11 we learn that these enemies are given to pagan practices. But the prophet does not yield for a moment. He sets his face like flint, because he is sure that at any moment God will intervene to vindicate him.

There is yet more evidence of conflict in later chapters. In ch. 51:7 the prophet addresses the friends of righteousness and

encourages them not to fear the reproaches and revilings of man. In ch. 56:10-12 he castigates religious officials who are irresponsible, greedy, and dissolute. In ch. 57:3-13 those who make public sport of him are described as indulging in pagan orgies of various kinds. In ch. 59 the delay of God's redemptive action is explained as the direct consequence of the nation's sins of murder, lying, dishonesty in the courts, and violence, and it is said that "he who departs from evil makes himself a prey" (v. 15).

The forces of paganism and evil are plainly to be found in the offices of authority in the community (ch. 65:13-14), so that in chs. 65 and 66 the prophet relinquishes his hope for the community as a whole and fixes it upon the faithful but persecuted remnant within the community. He speaks now of "my servants" instead of Israel the servant, contrasts the pagan section of the community (ch. 65:11) with the faithful servants (vs. 13-14), and announces that the name "Israel" will henceforward be used only as a curse (v. 15). The true servants will pray to the God of truth rather than to the God of Israel (v. 16).

In ch. 66 the enemies of the prophet are again denounced (vs. 1-4) for thinking they can please God by building him a temple and offering sacrifices while they withhold from him their obedience to his word. The faithful who "tremble at God's word" are represented as hated and cast out by their brethren "for my name's sake," that is, for their faithfulness to God (v. 5). The hostile brethren mock them, saying, "Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy," clearly a ridiculing of the hope that was central to the faith of the prophet. The line is drawn between a religious party that thinks it can maintain good relations with Yahweh by ceremonial sacrifices and a prophetic party that in the name of

Yahweh repudiates all such religion and calls for a simple trust and obedience.

The contrast is nowhere plainer than in ch. 58 where the prophet defines a true fast, setting on one side those who make a pretentious display of their ceremonial fasting, contentious in the midst of the ritual itself (v. 4) and ignorant enough to think that they could by such fasting lay God under obligation to them. On the other side are those who, because they are open to God, are open and responsive to the needs of their fellow men, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and taking the destitute into their homes (vs. 6-7).

Chapter 53 is to be understood against the background of this conflict between the true and the false Israel. The servant is both one and many. The servant is whoever puts himself unconditionally at the service of God's word. Most likely Second Isaiah saw in the servant not only himself and those who were banded together with him in his painful mission but also all those who in the past had suffered in faithfulness to the prophetic task. He may well have had Jeremiah in mind, but not Jeremiah alone. So also Christians in reading Isa., ch. 53, see in it another faithful Servant of the word, who was not to appear until five hundred years after Second Isaiah was in his grave. The style of ch. 53 is dramatic, the spokesman being someone in Israel who at first was blind to the divine office of the servant, seeing in him only a poor, deluded mortal, crazed by his dreams and with the curse of God resting plainly upon him, but who at some point had his eyes opened to see that, in this despised servant, God's redemptive power for Israel was being revealed. In him God was acting to give to his people a new future. In him God's cleansing forgiveness was being mediated to men. His sufferings were not for his own sins but for the sins of his fellow men. He was hated, persecuted,

and sent to his death, but God's triumph through him was sure, and he would yet look upon the fruits of his sufferings.

In this poem, in which the gospel of Second Isaiah and the gospel of Jesus Christ seem almost indistinguishable, the prophet was dealing with what must have been a distressing problem among his followers. They were accustomed to see in suffering a sign of punishment for sin. But they were suffering not for sin but for their faithfulness to God. Why should those who have put themselves completely at God's service be scorned, abused, and even killed? The answer of the prophet is that this suffering of the faithful servant has a purpose in God's way of working. He uses it to break through the stubborn wall in a sinful nation's heart and to open their eyes to his truth.

The closer we come to Second Isaiah the better we understand the part his writings played in the ministry of Jesus. Words from ch. 42:1 rang in Jesus' ears as the voice of God at his baptism (see Luke 3:21-22). His declaration of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth was based on ch. 61:1-3 (see Luke 4:18). The concept of the servant of God influenced his understanding of his own office, and undoubtedly prepared him for his ordeal of suffering. But Second Isaiah in his own day had a powerful ministry that must have made itself felt for generations in the shaping of his nation's faith.

HAGGAI

According to Ezra, chs. 1 to 4, an attempt was made in 538 B.C. to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. The work was undertaken by express permission of Cyrus and under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a grandson of King Jehoiakim who had been made governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. Both men had returned from exile in Babylon. The people of the

land and the Samaritans, however, obstructed the work and by their protests to the royal court brought it to a stop. It was most likely this attempt to restore sacrificial worship against which Second Isaiah protested (*Isa.*, ch. 66). If this be so, then it casts a heavy shadow upon Zerubbabel and Joshua in this early period and explains why Zechariah represents Joshua in filthy garments (*Zech.*, ch. 3) that have to be taken from him before he can rightly function as high priest. As The Book of Haggai opens, the year is 520 B.C., the Temple is still un-built, and the land is experiencing hard times. We know little more of Haggai than the name. His ministry was brief.

Haggai attributed the poverty of the people to God's anger at them for leaving the Temple in ruins while they themselves lived in fine houses (ch. 1:4-11). Zerubbabel and Joshua responded to the prophet's appeal by taking up the work before the month was out (vs. 12-15). Haggai encouraged them with a fresh prophecy in which he predicted the inbreaking of the Messianic Age, when the treasures of the nations would pour into Jerusalem (ch. 2:6-7). He expected the completion of the Temple to bring new fruitfulness to the land (vs. 18-19). It may be that the relaxation of Persian authority upon the death of Cyrus' son Cambyses in 522 B.C. encouraged Jewish nationalist hopes and that Haggai gave expression to this nationalism. He clearly expected Zerubbabel to be the Messianic king in the new age that was about to dawn (vs. 20-23). Haggai stands more in the tradition of the nationalist prophets of earlier days than in that of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah.

ZECHARIAH (CHAPTERS 1 TO 8)

The ministry of Zechariah slightly overlaps that of Haggai. The two were associated both in encouraging the building of the Temple (*Zech.* 1:16; *Ezra* 5:1-2) and in heralding a Messianic Age with Zerubbabel as Messiah (*Zech.* 6:9-15).

Zechariah came of a priestly line, his father having returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. (See Neh. 12:16.) His message is expressed chiefly in visions rather than in direct address. There is more ethical concern in Zechariah's oracles than in those of Haggai.

In his visions Zechariah heralds a new age. He calls for the exiles to return. The land is to be cleansed of its iniquity (ch. 5:5-11). Zerubbabel is to be king with a crown made from silver and gold brought from Babylon (ch. 6:9-14). But the prophet's hopes were disappointed. The high priest eventually became the civil ruler of the community, and a later editor substituted his name for that of Zerubbabel in ch. 6:11. In ch. 7, Zechariah seems closer to the earlier prophets in his depreciation of ceremonial fasting and his call for justice and mercy.

IN THE sixth and fifth centuries B.C. there was a remarkable growth and consolidation of several bodies of sacred literature among the Jews. The Pentateuch gradually came into its final form and by the time of Ezra had acquired a place of pre-eminent authority (Neh. 8:1-8). But collections of the writings of the prophets were also in circulation and during these years received many of those editorial glosses and additions that sharpened the statement of the severity of God's judgment upon Judah's enemies and brightened the promise of Judah's future. With the growth of a sacred Scripture there arose a new type of religious functionary, the scribe, whose task it was to interpret the Scriptures. The written word seemed to make unnecessary the prophetic word. The prophet declined rapidly in importance and stature and eventually disappeared altogether. The four prophets that remain for consideration illustrate this development, showing prophecy in sharp decline, yet with flashes of insight.

JOEL

Two distinctive characteristics mark the prophet Joel: his intense expectation of "the day of the Lord" and his interest as a prophet in the maintenance of the Temple sacrifices. The

first occasion of his prophesying seems to have been a devastating plague of locusts, which he pictures vividly in chs. 1 and 2, as if they were an invading army following a "scorched earth" policy and leaving the land bare behind them. In this plague of locusts Joel saw the hand of God in judgment. It was the day of the Lord, and the response of the nation should be repentance. It is noteworthy that to Joel the climax of the disaster was the cessation of daily sacrifices in the Temple (ch. 1:13), and that he called for repentance in the ceremonial form of fasting (chs. 1:13-14; 2:12, 15), though with emphasis upon the inward reality (ch. 2:13) of a return to God.

In the lifting of the locust peril Joel saw God's deliverance, and again the event was depicted in sweeping terms. Not only would the land now recover its fruitfulness but a new age would dawn, in which God's Spirit would be poured out upon young and old alike, so that all would be endowed like the prophets with insight and understanding. (Ch. 2:18-29.)

Yet another vision of the day of the Lord occupies the prophet in ch. 3, this time a day both of judgment for all the nations and of deliverance for Judah. Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom are all to receive their punishment for mistreatment of Judah, and Jerusalem will dwell secure forevermore. The date of these oracles is probably later than 400 B.C. but cannot be fixed with any accuracy.

MALACHI

The author of this last book of the Old Testament is nameless, but a later editor, seizing upon the word *Malachi*, "my messenger," in Mal. 3:1 took this as his name (ch. 1:1). Like Joel he was deeply interested in the Temple ceremonies, for to him their proper performance was necessary to a right relationship with God. Profanations of the sanctuary are the sins against which he protests most passionately (ch. 2:11).

Sacrifices are made unacceptable to God by blemishes in the animals offered (ch. 1:6-14). The priests show partiality in the pronouncements of their judgments (ch. 2:1-9). The people are cheating God by not bringing into the Temple the full tithe (ch. 3:7-10). The one practice in common life on which he turns his censure is the frequency of divorce (ch. 2:14-16), though in ch. 3:5 he condemns briefly a variety of evil doings.

The prophet makes use of a curious dialogue form in his oracles, posing the questions of the people and then answering them. To those who question God's love for Israel he points to some recent disaster upon Edom (ch. 1:2-5) as evidence that God will not let Judah's enemies prosper forever. This conception of God's care for Judah was to become only too general in the postexilic centuries.

The prophet awaited a day of judgment when God would consume the wicked like stubble and vindicate his faithful servants (ch. 4:1-3). For the priests of the Temple it would be a day of purging and refining, cleansing them for their office (ch. 3:1-4). As herald of this day of judgment and deliverance he expected the prophet Elijah to reappear (ch. 4:5-6), an expectation that the early Christian church considered to be fulfilled in John the Baptist.

JONAH

The Book of Jonah takes its name not from its author but from the chief character in the story that the book tells. The name of the author is unknown, but his achievement sets him in a direct line with the greatest of the prophets. The book differs from all other books of the prophets in containing not a series of oracles but rather the story of a very odd prophet. (A prophet Jonah is referred to in II Kings 14:25, but he has nothing in common with the prophet in this book except the name.)

First, one must determine the intention of this story. It is not difficult to recognize that it is not intended to be read as history. A prophet who goes in the opposite direction from that in which he is sent, who is returned to his task only by the interposition of a great fish, and who weeps bitterly when his preaching has a swift acceptance is a strange creature. Equally strange are a storm pursuing the ship on which the prophet travels but is stilled when he is thrown overboard, a sojourn of the prophet for three days and three nights inside the fish, the growth of a gourd to an immense size in a single day, the existence of a city sixty miles in diameter and the conversion of its entire population. If offered as history, such incidents are patently absurd. But as a prophetic parable the story is superb and profound in its significance.

The Book of Jonah must be understood against the background of a Judaism that was becoming increasingly narrow in its conception of God's purpose for the world. Rankling under the painful experiences of centuries under the heel of foreign nations, Judaism had become more and more exclusive in its definition of those who belong within God's people and more and more eager for a day of judgment when all non-Jewish nations would receive their just reward. Second Isaiah's interpretation of the nation's destiny as the bearer of truth and salvation for all the world and his dream of a day when all men would acknowledge Israel's God as their sovereign were forgotten. In contact with foreigners Jews were kind and considerate because their traditional faith demanded of them mercy and kindness in human relations, but it had become a fixed article of their religion that God had only wrath for the foreign nations.

To this situation the story of Jonah is addressed. Jonah is the incarnation of the religious attitude of the Jewish community. If sent by God to preach repentance to pagan Nineveh,

they too would go in the opposite direction. They could identify themselves readily with Jonah as the story unfolded. On shipboard Jonah showed a kindly concern for his pagan shipmates. He did not wish them to perish on his account when the storm overtook the ship, and he was willing even to be thrown overboard for their sakes. The gentle ridicule of the story would gradually make itself felt. Jonah could have mercy on foreign unbelievers, but God must not have mercy on them!

The point of ridicule is sharpened in chs. 3 and 4. This time Jonah went at God's command to Nineveh, but when the whole city repented at his word he behaved in a most absurd fashion: he sat down and wept. He desired not the salvation but the destruction of Nineveh. While he sat waiting to see what God would do, God made a gourd grow up swiftly to give him shade from the sun. But the next day the gourd withered and died, and Jonah was provoked that God would let the pleasant gourd die. Again Jonah and the Jewish nation with him were reduced to absurdity. He had pity for a gourd but no pity for the thousands of helpless persons old and young in the city of Nineveh!

The great fish, in chs. 1:17; 2:1, has had altogether too much attention. Its true significance is suggested by Jer. 51:34, 44, where the exile of Israel and its deliverance from exile are likened to the swallowing of the nation by a great sea monster and the vomiting forth of the people again after many years.

The psalm in ch. 2 is plainly a later insert, v. 10 continuing directly the narrative of v. 1. The psalmist is not in the belly of a fish but rather describes himself as plunged in the depths of the sea and at the very gates of Sheol (the place of the dead) since he has been banished from the presence of God.

The parable has sometimes been thought unfinished since

it ends so abruptly. This abruptness, however, is typical of this type of parable, as may be observed in its use by Nathan (II Sam., ch. 12) and by Jesus (Luke 10:25-35). The absurdity of Jonah's faithlessness has been laid bare; that is sufficient. No further word need be spoken. But the prophetic appeal of the book for an Israel that would grasp its missionary destiny went largely unheeded until in the fullness of time it was heard with new power and secured a new response in the Christian gospel and the Christian church.

SECOND ZECHARIAH (CHAPTERS 9 TO 14)

The six concluding chapters of The Book of Zechariah are of a different character from the first eight and clearly come from a later day. The promise that the sons of Zion will triumph over the sons of Greece (ch. 9:13) suggests a date after 323 B.C. The chapters contain promises of crushing judgments upon all the enemies of Judah and of great Messianic triumphs for the faithful Jews, and it was undoubtedly this Messianic note that caused the chapters to be attached to the oracles of Zechariah and later made them of unusual interest to the early Christian church. The heralding of the arrival of the Davidic king in Jerusalem riding upon an ass to establish his dominion from sea to sea (ch. 9:9-10) was to become part of the Christian Passion story.

The prophet who composed these chapters lived in a difficult time. The allegory of the shepherds in ch. 11 is very obscure, but it represents Judah as a nation, oppressed by foreign rulers, but so rebellious against its divine Shepherd that in exasperation he breaks his two staffs, Grace and Union. Also, in ch. 13, the age is depicted as so evil that anyone who is called to be a prophet will conceal his calling and profess to be only a farmer. So low will the office of prophet have sunk that parents will murder their own son rather than have him

appear as a prophet (v. 3). Yet God will appear like a mighty giant bestriding Jerusalem (ch. 14:4) and will sweep away all the enemies of Judah. The nation will be cleansed and even the bells on the horses and the pots in the houses will be sacred in the New Jerusalem (vs. 20-21).

THEY, BEING DEAD, YET SPEAK

Here, with what must seem a rude abruptness, we interrupt the story of the prophets of Israel, but only because the two final, towering figures in the succession are dealt with in another book in this series. We have considered only the prophets of the Old Testament. John the Baptist and Jesus in the New Testament bring the prophetic movement to its climax, and through them it becomes one of the major forces in the shaping of the Christian mission. Just as the Reformation church reached back across the centuries and established a fresh continuity with the church of the Scriptures, so also the New Testament church reached back across the centuries of Judaism and established a fresh continuity with the Israel of the prophets. Therefore, the voice of the prophets is not to be conceived as gradually dying away, to remain only a curious phenomenon of an ancient world. In Jesus Christ the prophets come alive again in such a way that they can no more die than Jesus Christ can die. They live in him, and a church that claims to be his body must suffer the discomfort and know the joy of having its life continually in "the goodly fellowship of the Prophets."